



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Third Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

Issue 10

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

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

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	Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
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	Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

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

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some visitors from Saxony, Germany, including the Hon. Stanislaw Tillich, who is the Minister President of the Free State of Saxony; Mrs. Veronika Tillich, the Minister President's wife; His Excellency Dr. Georg Witschel, who is the ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, in his first official visit to Alberta; Mrs. Andrea Dombois, vice-president of the Parliament for the Free State of Saxony; State Secretary Johann-Adolf Cohausz, who is the spokesman for the government; Mr. Hansjörg König, State Secretary of the Ministry for Higher Education, Research and the Fine Arts; Dr. Roger Mackeldey, head of the division for international relations, state chancellery; Mrs. Jutta Wolf, division for international relations, state chancellery; Ms Melanie Ottenbreit, head of the press division; and a good friend of ours, Mr. Bernd Reuscher, honorary consul of Germany in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today President Tillich and I signed an agreement to renew the Alberta-Saxony co-operation for another five years. We both agreed that this agreement will further strengthen ties between our two jurisdictions, and we also agreed that we should get it signed before Canada plays Germany this afternoon. This agreement will provide us a platform for exploring new opportunities for collaboration. Germany is the largest economy in Europe. Alberta's relationship with this economic powerhouse will help us build a stronger position in a global marketplace and increase our province's competitive advantage. We also look forward to working with Ambassador Witschel and his staff to further enhance the ties between Alberta and Germany.

Mr. Speaker, our honoured guests are seated in your gallery, and I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly someone who is indeed no stranger to us, the current Member of Parliament for Edmonton-St. Albert, the hon. Mr. Brent Rathgeber. Those of you who may know Brent will realize, of course, that in recent times he was the former MLA for Edmonton-Calder, until the electorate ultimately decided that they needed a taller one. It's a rare opportunity for Mr. Rathgeber to be here today, which may or may not have anything to do with Parliament currently being prorogued. I would invite him to stand and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

## Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly another group of outstanding young students from Donnan elementary school in my constituency. Forty-seven of them are here today, including teachers and group leaders Mr. Jason Knight, Mr. Gerry Hawkes, and Mr. Sheldon Sitter. I would ask them all to please rise, and the rest of us can welcome them with a thunderous round of applause.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a group of grade 6 students from Holy Family Catholic school in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. I had the privilege of meeting them moments ago, and I hope they're having a good time at the Legislature. They're sitting in both galleries today. I ask them along with their teachers, Mrs. Marlene Norsworthy and Mrs. Isabel Pinto, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today three gentlemen who are seated front and centre in the members' gallery. We have Jim Bowhay, president of the Feeder Associations of Alberta, who is a cattle rancher from Sundre; Mr. Reg Schmidt, general manager of the Feeder Associations of Alberta and a cattle feeder from Thorsby, and I'm told by my hon. colleague from Drayton Valley-Calmar that that's in her constituency; and we have Pat James, who is a 40-year member of the association and who has a ranch in Olds known as EV Ranches. Pat is also a member of the Farm Products Council of Canada, but more importantly Pat has been a long-time riding buddy of mine. We trail ride in the Rocky Mountains, and we've had a couple of occasions to try to give riding lessons to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, with limited success. I'd now ask them to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Duncan Wojtaszek. Duncan is the executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students, CAUS, which is an advocacy group representing the interests of over 70,000 university students across the province. CAUS has been working very hard for the past year to see the adoption of some of the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer's report on the 2008 election regarding postsecondary students. I will be tabling their report and recommendations today, which is entitled Students and Democracy: Improving Post-Secondary Student Voter Turnout in Alberta Elections. I'd like to ask Duncan to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly

the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees' Committee on Political Action. I'd ask them to rise as their names are called. They're seated in the public gallery. There's Glen Scott, chair and vice-president; Kathy Cayenne, local 071; Gerald Forbes, local 071; Bill Piggott, local 003; Garry Ritchie, local 003; Christina Sefton, local 048; and David Climenhaga, the staff adviser. Our caucus had a very nice chat with them this morning, and we look forward to working with them as we move forward. I ask all members of this Assembly to give them a warm welcome.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, do you have another one?

**Mr. Elniski:** Yes, I have another one. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two individuals from the Children's Autism Services of Edmonton. One in 150 children are affected by autism, and many of these children are on the waiting list for treatment. Children's Autism Services of Edmonton has put forward a development proposal to build a clinic to meet the needs of children affected by autism and their families. I will be discussing more about this organization and their proposal in a member's statement later this afternoon. For now I would ask them both to rise: Miss Terri Duncan, the executive director of Children's Autism Services of Edmonton; and Mrs. Marcy Henschel, a mom of twins affected by autism. Please receive the traditional warm greetings of the Assembly.

1:40

### Members' Statements

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

#### Alberta Queen's Printer

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last session I asked a question in question period about the Queen's Printer and the downloading of copies from the Queen's Printer website. I'm pleased to say that subsequent to my question the Queen's Printer is now offering copies of all Alberta statutes from their website at no charge to the public and also, I should add, all Alberta regulations.

My thanks to the minister responsible for Service Alberta for the prompt action on this query. This may seem like a small concession and a small issue to many people. It was likely a small concession, but I would suggest that it is not a small issue. There are over 600 acts and over a thousand regulations that comprise Alberta statute law. We are all deemed to know the law. It is important to know the law, for if one should break the law, you will be brought to justice. To expect everyone to know all of Alberta's laws and the intricacies of those laws is absurd, yet it is important for government not to erect barriers to a person's desire to know the laws that affect them in their everyday lives.

Unfortunately, Alberta law is just the tip of the iceberg, for there is also a myriad of Canadian acts and regulations as well as municipal bylaws that one must also wish to acquaint themselves with. Fortunately, however, Canadian statutes and many municipal bylaws are also readily available and downloadable from the website, free of charge, I might add.

As we all know, the law does not stop with the statutes and bylaws but extends to the many decisions of Alberta's courts as well as the Supreme Court of Canada. Again, we are fortunate to have all of those cases, at least all recent cases, readily available on the web.

I guess that in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that with the facilities we have through the Internet and with the co-operation of agencies such as the Queen's Printer, we in Alberta are very

fortunate to have all of this important information at our fingertips, convenient and at little or no cost.

Thank you.

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

#### Children's Autism Services of Edmonton

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to speak a little bit more about the two people that I introduced earlier from Children's Autism Services of Edmonton, or CASE. As a service delivery agency CASE does a remarkable job supporting over 85 families in Edmonton with the challenge of raising a child affected by autism. While they do their best to meet the needs of the children affected with autism in Edmonton, they cannot continue to operate effectively without a proper treatment facility. Staff are spending more time driving to clients and less time with actual clients.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the family-focused treatment we expect in one of the best health care systems in the country. In 2008 CASE started a capital campaign called The Children Can't Wait, a campaign to grow a treatment centre. The campaign proposes to build a clinic with special equipment that will support the needs and growth of autistic children. With the facility CASE is expected to see a 20 per cent improvement in productivity because they will spend more time with their clients, addressing their needs, and less time commuting to their clients.

Edmonton is one of the only major cities in Canada without a treatment centre of this kind. CASE is hoping to raise \$5.5 million to build this facility and are well on their way to doing so. Without our support, however, children affected by autism and parents like Marcy Henschel are unable to get the immediate, life-changing treatment that their children deserve.

Hon members, we need to act now to support this cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Electoral Reform

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every member of this Assembly is sitting here today because our fellow citizens chose us to serve as their representatives. Some people may be a little jaded about democracy, but I'm still amazed, astounded, and grateful that we live in a nation where people rule themselves. We need not fear tyrants in Canada or in Alberta for our democratic system protects us from would-be dictators and autocrats.

We all know that the price of democracy is eternal vigilance, and Albertans have reason to be concerned about democracy in Alberta. This is no external threat but an internal one. The majority of Albertans have stopped exercising their right to vote, with voter turnout reaching an all-time low of 41 per cent last election. Voter turnout among young Albertans is particularly disappointing, but there are a few young people who are working hard to change that. The Council of Alberta University Students has identified a number of barriers to greater student participation in elections, and they have offered five recommendations to break down these barriers.

First, they feel that students should be allowed to choose between their residence during studies and their family home for the purpose of identifying their ordinary residence; that is, which constituency they can vote in. Second, they would like advance voting stations to be established on postsecondary campuses. Third, they would like advance voting for all electoral divisions at any returning office as well as any advance voting station. Fourth, they feel that returning officers should be selected earlier, a recommendation I think many candidates would heartily endorse.

Finally, these students would like to have Elections Alberta and individual returning officers work with student unions to increase voter turnout. The key here is accessibility and awareness. Make it easier for students to vote, and perhaps we can kick that voter turnout rate a couple of percentage points in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the council of Alberta students for considering these important issues and making these recommendations. I hope that this administration will heed their advice.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

#### **Bawlf School Eracism Project Achievement**

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a special occasion when constituents from anywhere in Alberta are recognized on the world stage, and I'm proud to say that today is one of those occasions. It's my pleasure to be able to rise today and recognize a grade 8 class from Bawlf school, within the constituency of Battle River-Wainwright, for their participation in the Eracism debate.

Eracism is an online, world-wide debate with the goal of eradicating racism by starting with students, our future leaders, first. The countries represented during the debate included the United States, India, China, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Australia, and of course from Canada, Bawlf school.

For most grade 8 students I'm sure it would be intimidating to debate students from all corners of the world, but the students from Bawlf school believed in themselves and in the resolution they were debating. The resolution was: differences make us stronger. With that belief and a great deal of debating skill Bawlf school advanced all the way to the semifinals, Mr. Speaker. They came down to being one of the last four teams from around the world.

I'm incredibly proud of the students' success, but I'm most proud of the efforts of the students and the teachers from Bawlf school, who so effectively articulated the values and ideas of Canada and Alberta, and I know I share in the pride of the parents in their children's achievements.

Differences, Mr. Speaker, certainly do make us stronger, and the differences and the diversity within this Assembly are a perfect example of that. After all, it is a combination of our shared experiences and diversity that sheds light on new ways of thinking and improving the province in which we live.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to commend the staff and students of Bawlf school for their participation and accomplishments in the Eracism debates and thank them for representing Alberta so well on the international stage. Thank you.

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

#### **Amanda Lindhout**

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure today to rise and speak about an event that I attended over the weekend. I and the Member for Calgary-East had the honour of meeting Amanda Lindhout, who was held hostage in Somalia for some 15 months.

Mr. Speaker, there is no honour significant enough and no medal or cup or award prestigious enough to recognize her. She put her life in danger because, as she put it, she wanted to bring light to the crisis in Somalia in her own humble way. Despite everything she went through, she says: despite my own suffering in Somalia and without condoning what was done to me, I feel that those inflicting the violence, while certainly not innocent, are deeply wounded and war traumatized individuals. It takes a profound human being to see the perpetrators of such acts in that way.

There is a need in our world today for individuals like Amanda. There's a need for people that stand up against injustice and recognize that they can do a small part in bringing more justice in our world. A few hours ago I learned of a Sikh man that was beheaded by the Taliban for being a minority in Pakistan. This world today more than ever needs individuals like Amanda that have the courage, the conviction, and the heart to do something about the injustices that are all around us throughout this world.

We need people like Amanda to stand strong, and we need nations like Canada to build a greater democratic and peaceful society around our world, Mr. Speaker.

#### **Oral Question Period**

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

#### **1:50 Review of MLA Compensation**

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to acknowledge that yesterday afternoon the Assembly unanimously passed the Alberta Liberals' Motion 501, which called for an independent review of MLA pay. This is a very encouraging step. How this government responds to the passing of this motion will be a true test of its openness and accountability. To the Premier: when will the Premier establish an independent committee to review MLA pay?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we will begin to work on establishing the committee. Because it was a motion passed before the House, it's incumbent upon the government to begin those discussions, and I'm open to the opposition taking part in those discussions just like we have MLAs taking part in the Members' Services Committee. We have members of all parties represented.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you to the Premier. Again to the Premier: what does the Premier envision as the scope of the committee?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I have some ideas. I'm sure the Liberals have some ideas. The other parties have some ideas. Let's come together and build a committee and bring clarity to this issue.

**Dr. Swann:** Very good. Finally, to the Premier: does the Premier envision the committee being functional by this fall?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton Gold-Bar.

#### **Cabinet Policy Committees**

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the Legislative Assembly Act in order to be paid for sitting on a cabinet policy committee, three things must happen: payments must be reported, the rate of payment must be set through order in council, and the appointments to these committees must be done by an order in council, by a ministerial order, or by regulation. My first question is to the Premier: why did the Premier appoint 69 government MLAs, that were paid last year \$1.4 million, to five cabinet policy committees without issuing an order in council?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All members on CPCs are paid in accordance with an order in council that was passed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: given that we have requested a copy of this order in council going back to December 9, 2009, when will this order in council be made public?

**Mr. Hancock:** All orders in council are published and made public.

**Mr. MacDonald:** It is interesting, Mr. Speaker, that this one to date has not.

Now, again to the Premier. The Premier set up these appointments; he can answer this question. Who in the Premier's office decided to set up the cabinet policy committees in such a way that the Legislative Assembly Act was not followed when those appointments were set up?

**Mr. Stelmach:** They're not committees of the Legislature.

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

#### Peter Lougheed Centre Beds

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago we asked the minister of health when the 140 empty beds at the Peter Lougheed hospital in Calgary would be opened to provide relief to the overburdened hospitals in Calgary. The minister said that he had already told Alberta Health Services to look into it, so these questions are to the minister. When can Calgary see these 140 beds opened?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, what I said was that I would pass that information along to Alberta Health Services, and in fact it's on our agenda for further discussion tomorrow evening. I don't think that a decision will be made tomorrow evening, but it's up for discussion. It all has to be part of our longer term capital plan, which I said we would have ready on or about March 31.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. According to the March 2009 CEO's report of Alberta Health Services it was estimated that \$48 million to \$50 million would be needed in operating funds for the 140 beds at the Peter Lougheed. When these beds are open, will Health Services make this funding part of their permanent operating costs for the next five years, or is this a one-off this year?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, the answer in large part will come when we have the five-year funding plan in place. That'll be starting on April 1, 2010, and those very considerations and concerns that the hon. member has raised will be given the exact discussion that he requested and that I have demanded.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Existing hospitals are already understaffed. How many RNs and LPNs and support staff will be needed if those 140 beds are to be kept open?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, I don't have the math in my head, Mr. Speaker. I visited that particular Peter Lougheed Centre a couple of

weeks ago, and I can tell you that the nurses and the LPNs and the docs and the nurse practitioners and the front-line triage people are working extremely hard, and they're very pleased, as are the patients, to have the new wing open. What we're looking at now is: what's the best use of the 140 beds that had to be closed? We're considering all of that right now.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

#### Government Caucus Consultation

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seniors have built this province. MLAs bring ideas from seniors to their respective caucuses. About a year and a half ago I sat on the government side when I brought an idea of a long-term care centre that the government committed to in a commitment to the people of Fort McMurray. New money has been spent, but the old commitments have not been lived up to. My question to the Premier is: why don't you listen to your backbench MLAs?

**Mr. Stelmach:** First of all, I've said this in the House: we don't have any backbench MLAs; they're all government members. Secondly, we take the advice of all of our government members seriously. That's how we build our capital plan and all of our policies.

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere pointed out that as the budget came forward, the Premier failed to go back to his caucus, so what is disturbing is why he is not choosing to ask his caucus members when changes are being made. This summer he kicked me out of his government caucus without consulting with his caucus. My question is: for an MLA doing their job representing seniors, why were you failing to consult with your caucus members this past summer?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I think there's a huge misunderstanding on that side of the House. If this Minister of Finance and Enterprise disclosed to caucus his budget before he introduced it in terms of all of our projections with respect to natural gas, oil, all of the tax implications or no tax implications, I would have had to fire him. I have great confidence in this minister. He brought in a tremendous budget. Albertans are supporting it in overwhelming numbers, and I stick to it.

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question now is Calgary MLAs. Of course, a commitment was made to the city of Calgary, commitments again that are now not being honoured. Are MLAs from Calgary going to be kicked out of the caucus for representing their constituents, for doing their job in bringing forward the points that are so important in an MLA's responsibility?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that he's referring to the municipal sustainability initiative. No province, absolutely no province in the country of Canada supports municipalities like this province. That is guaranteed. Secondly, in recognition of the good, close working co-operation we have with municipalities, we indicated to all municipalities through very open and transparent dialogue that there will be changes in the funding coming this year.

However, before the end of December we gave them a general knowledge in terms of what their MSI funding would look like. That is, I believe, good co-operation with municipalities, and many have worked that into their budgets and have continued to operate.

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

#### Homelessness Initiatives

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. This minister has talked about the complex issues around homelessness and that there's no one-size-fits-all approach to ending homelessness. I would like to know what he is doing to address the realities that service agencies face of more demand and less support for assisting the homeless?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for that question. She's quite correct: there is not one size that fits all. Just over this weekend I saw an example of the private sector partnering with government and nongovernment agencies through something called project homeless connect, which was held downtown in Calgary at the Suncor Energy Centre. More than 5,200 people have participated in this over the past eight years. Some of the services that were provided included medical treatment, mental health services, and income support. I also had the opportunity to meet with 12 homeless people after they had asked me for a meeting, and they had some very interesting perspectives on this difficult issue.

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

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is also to the same minister. Some would perceive that using the word "partnership" could mean downloading onto municipalities and the nonprofit sector. Groups who protect vulnerable Albertans are stretched financially, and the cuts in this current budget certainly are not helping. What would this minister do to protect the many vulnerable Albertans, including the chronically homeless, who require various services?

2:00

**Mr. Denis:** I'd like to thank the hon. member for that question, a good question again. At the same time to this House: we're the only province that has a 10-year plan to end homelessness. We're just finishing the first year of this plan. We're ahead of schedule, where we are looking at going, but at the same time we have looked at some rationalization of some costs. It's important also to look at the taxpayers who are funding us and give them value for their money. You will see performance measures implemented by my department over the next several months.

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

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

#### Municipal Campaign Election Financing

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs responded to my questions by saying that the government wants to "level the playing field" with election financing laws for municipalities. But here's the thing. The individual wards in Edmonton and Calgary are bigger than many entire

municipalities, with 60,000 or more constituents. So what playing field is the minister trying to level, the urban-metro one with 60,000-plus constituents or the rural one with 10,000?

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I was reiterating some of the comments that we are hearing from Albertans in general. Albertans are believing in accountability, and they are wanting to see transparency within their local governments. They believe that those issues are important. So part of the process of Bill 203 was the fact that we are trying to have the same rules for every elected official across the province of Alberta.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would think that you would be trying to raise the bar rather than lower the bar. Given that the city of Edmonton has election financing rules that are already more comprehensive and in some ways stricter than the provincial rules, is the government trying to make Edmonton conform to weakened average provincial rules?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, certainly the regulations and the rules and the amendments to the bill that are coming forward will provide some clarity to all municipal elected officials. I recognize that Edmonton has their own rules and regulations. When we do introduce the amendments, it's going to complement those types of decisions that they've made in the past.

**Mr. Taylor:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know about clarity, but there's a big fat catch-22 here. Candidates are individually responsible for their campaign debts, but if the debt is greater than \$5,000, they can't pay it individually because that would contravene the act's limits. How would the minister advise that this situation be addressed?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, I think, you know, aside from disclosing the information that will be coming up after our break, that clarity will be provided when we introduce the amendments.

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

#### Foreign Qualifications

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. New immigrants are constantly faced with the challenge of getting their international training and credentials recognized right here in Alberta. In fact, it can be so challenging that we hear about potential doctors, engineers, and other professionals working as taxi drivers and at fast-food counters. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What are you doing to help speed up this process so that they can utilize their expertise?

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, there are anecdotal stories of doctors driving taxicabs. Any time we have human capital that is underutilized in this province, it is not only unfortunate to that very individual himself or herself but also to our economy and to all of Alberta. In view of that, right now our department is developing the foreign qualification recognition

program, assisting self-governing bodies in determining who should and should not practise in Alberta. Let's keep in mind that it's not the government, nor is it us here in this House, who should determine who are qualified doctors.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. Mr. Minister, we hear of so much red tape when it comes to evaluating foreign credentials. So my question is: are associations and other institutions properly equipped to fairly and quickly assess foreign credentials?

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I started answering in my first answer, you don't want government or politicians making a decision on who are qualified doctors. That's why we task self-governing bodies such as the colleges and other professional organizations and/or employers. In view of that, my department has put in \$2 million to develop tools assisting colleges and other self-governing bodies in processing and setting up expectations so that individuals, even before they board a plane coming to Alberta, can determine what their likelihood is of actually practising in this province in their profession.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Is your department doing enough to ensure that foreign-trained professionals can receive their credentials in a timely manner and resume their careers here in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working very diligently to work with international professionals and international students because it is very, very important to our next generation economy. It's very important to the future of the province. Our prior learning assessment plan is there for international professionals coming into the province to help them bridge to whatever new credential they may need given their professional body. We stand ready to work with them to create the kind of bridging that needs to happen within the province.

#### Chief Electoral Officer

**Mr. Hehr:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans have been both supportive and proud of our troops serving overseas in the protection and defence of people's right to vote for a democratically elected representative. Given this backdrop, my question is for the Justice minister. Why did your government select an individual to run Elections Alberta who does not believe that it's his job to encourage people to vote, or is this the government's whole idea?

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

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not my understanding that the government did select this individual. I believe that was the purview of this House.

**Mr. Hehr:** I understand that, but we all know who actually selects these individuals to run our departments.

Do you think it's possible for your department to maybe instruct this individual that their mandate is to encourage active participation in getting Albertans to vote, or are you going to ignore that job?

#### Speaker's Ruling

##### Questions about Officers of the Assembly

**The Speaker:** Well, hon. member, just for clarification. The person in question, the Chief Electoral Officer, is an officer of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, not the government of Alberta. If it came to my attention that a minister of the Crown was actually intervening in the affairs of an officer of the Legislative Assembly, there would be an intervention all right. It would come from me.

Third question.

#### Chief Electoral Officer

*(continued)*

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that. I guess I just like the old way when the old guy was actually trying to actively promote things and actually get people to vote, but who am I to argue with the process that we have in place here?

I guess my final question for the political minister – I mean the Justice minister – is that given her answers today are what most people already know, are there really any substantive changes coming to the electoral act? Can we see some fixed election dates? Can we see some reform to university students being able to vote at the schools where they're going to school? Or what's going on?

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

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I'd say is that if there are people in Alberta that are concerned about the efficiency, the transparency, or the honesty of this system, I would suggest that one of the reasons for that might be because of the sort of information that's being propagated through the prelims to these questions.

However, Mr. Speaker, as I have said on more than a regular basis, we will be introducing amendments to the Election Act based on the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer, both the current one and the previous one, as a result of lessons learned from the past two elections that are printed in published reports. I think we'll have a great debate in the Legislature.

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

#### Provincial Achievement Tests

**Mr. Marz:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we heard in the Assembly that the number of teachers has increased in the province by 10 per cent while at the same time the student population has only increased by 1 per cent. My question to the Minister of Education is: have student achievement test results seen a corresponding rate of increase during that same time frame?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the short answer to that would have to be no. The PAT results, or the standard of excellence, have remained relatively stable during this time frame. There was a slight decline since 2005-2006. We saw improvement at the acceptable and excellence levels in 2008 and 2009. But I'd have to say that student outcomes have not increased commensurate with the investment in the class size initiative.

**Mr. Marz:** Mr. Speaker, we've repeatedly heard that high class sizes produce low test results. Then wouldn't it be logical to assume



that lower class sizes should produce better test results? Why is this not the case?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that there are a number of factors that go into it. Having said that student outcomes haven't increased in a commensurate way is not to say that there haven't been a lot of good things happen as a result of the class size initiative. Teacher satisfaction, parent satisfaction with the education system has improved significantly. Obviously, the ability of teachers to do their jobs has improved significantly. With respect to the question of outcomes I think it's fair to say that the research and the literature suggest that class sizes themselves in the higher grades do not make a significant difference, but it does at K to 3.

2:10

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

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then my final question to the same minister: what's this minister doing to improve test results aside from just trying to reduce class size?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that in this year's budget we have reprofiled the class size initiative money so that it is focusing on increasing the number of teachers at the K to 3 level, where the research shows that it does make a significant difference, and at the high school level with respect to the credit enrolment units for courses where it makes a difference; in other words, courses where safety is a factor or class size is a factor.

The other thing we have to realize is that there are differences in class sizes across the province, and what we report on are the averages of school boards.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

#### Peace and Police Officer Training Centre

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We speak of the extreme importance of oil and gas in Alberta and to Albertans, but we can't lose sight of Alberta south of Calgary. The promised police college is very important for police services, retaining our rural culture, and fostering economic diversity in our rural communities. To the Solicitor General. Fort Macleod has had this carrot dangled in front of it since 2006. Why has the minister waited so long to provide them with answers?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I haven't waited all that long. I've been in the position for about a month.

The hon. member will know the conditions under which this college was first suggested, that being that it gets private funding and it's operationally self-sufficient. Given the fact that I can't identify private funding to that level, I have no public funds to proceed. Given that, I will do everything I can to make this project proceed, but I can't make any promises at this time.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you for that. I think that's a tiny little door that's opened.

My next question is: can we expect a concrete, well-prepared, long-term implementation strategy or evidence of any sort of planning? What kind of work has been done to actually attract private? Should we maybe rethink private?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, we can rethink private if we want, Mr. Speaker, but the fact remains that I don't have any public funds available to me right now. As the hon. member pointed out, we need long-term planning. I think we have a capital plan that stretches out for a very long term. In order to pull this project off, I would need to find a way to reprofile that, and I can't do that right now.

**Ms Pastoor:** Okay. My next question to the same minister: I guess, given those answers, what I'd like to hear is that there is a pledge that it will be built.

**Mr. Oberle:** I've made about the clearest pledge I can make, Mr. Speaker, and that is that I will work very hard for the citizens of Fort Macleod and the MLA that represents this area. I feel for their position. I will do everything I can to make that college happen.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

#### Long-term Care Funding

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's NDP caucus has heard from Albertans what they want from their health care system, and as we've mentioned in the report of what people want, long-term care is a top concern. This government's move to close long-term care beds in favour of private assisted living facilities allows operators to charge outrageous fees for services that are covered under long-term care. Here's an example from one in Edmonton: if you need to be escorted to the dining room, \$300 a month extra; \$125 a month for help with putting on your support stockings; \$75 a month to get your bedsheets washed. Why is the minister of health closing long-term care beds in this province and forcing people into private facilities?

**Mr. Zwodzdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any long-term care beds that are being closed. In fact, the opposite is true. We're actually looking at building more long-term care spaces. We have about 20,000 such spaces in Alberta today. We have about 9,000 acute-care spaces. We need more. We have about 2,000 addiction treatment beds in this province, and we're working on increasing that as well. So it's really kind of the opposite to what the member is saying.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, it's not kind of the opposite. In fact, many long-term care beds have been closed in this province since the last election despite a previous promise to build 600 more.

Here are some more costs: incontinence management, \$175 a month; oxygen, \$175 a month; medication assistance, \$200 a month. This is basic care, Mr. Minister, and public long-term care facilities do not charge extra for it. Why can't the minister of health see that forcing seniors to pay these kinds of fees for basic care could send grandparents to the poorhouse?

**Mr. Zwodzdesky:** Mr. Speaker, we're going to be building more long-term care facilities. I think everybody knows that. The hon. member may have missed the announcement that there's a \$100 million bond issue right now, and all of that money is going to go toward that. Plus we have a long-term plan coming out on or about March 31. It's called the health facilities capital plan. There will be, I anticipate, some additional good-news announcements in that package of goods as well.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that this minister understands the difference between long-term care and assisted

living because we're talking about assisted living. We released a report showing the government's plan to eliminate many of the long-term care beds in this province. Now, \$300 a month for meal escorts, \$150 a month for night checks, and \$100 a month for a weekly bath is way too much for ordinary seniors and their families to be able to afford. Why won't the minister be clear that long-term care beds, where things are not charged for, are in fact what the government is intending to build?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I'm sharply aware of some of the fundamental differences between long-term care and assisted living or daily assisted living or supportive living or whatever. I know that under the long-term care arrangements, for example, we must have 24/7 supervision by a registered nurse whereas in some of the other facilities registered nurses might be on call but not necessarily staffed at the facility. Nonetheless, the issues that he has raised are those that are on the table for discussion right now.

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

### Primary Care Networks

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I met with a group of doctors on the management team of the Wolf Creek Primary Care Network. They, along with all Albertans, feel strongly about making improvements to our health care system. They support innovation and creative solutions that positively address faster access and better availability of services. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Since primary care networks are proving to be very effective in my area, can the minister assure us that they will continue to be funded?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, we have about 32 of these so-called primary care networks in Alberta that involve a team-based approach. Those teams vary; they could be a doctor, a pharmacist, a registered nurse, a dietitian, a physiotherapist, or any combination thereof. They're doing a very good job, in my view. My hope is that the PCNs will, of course, be continued, and that's what we're striving so hard to do. The funding, however, is going to be part of the discussion, depending on how the contract negotiations go. Those are coming up very soon, so my hope is there.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Well, thank you. Albertans also want more emphasis on prevention and wellness. My question is again for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister have any plans to expand primary care networks so that more Albertans will be able to benefit from this team-based approach for primary health care delivery?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, in addition to the 32 that we already have up and running that are proving very successful, I'm aware of at least 11 others that are under development. I expect at least six of those to come on stream very soon. Now, the issue of the funding. This is all part of the five-year funding plan, so we just have to be patient until April 1 comes along, and then they'll have the details they seek.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Lacombe the Wolf Creek Primary Care Network, which includes Lacombe, Ponoka, Rimbey,

and Sylvan Lake, does an outstanding job for constituents in central Alberta. Is there anything the minister can do to increase the effectiveness of primary care networks in terms of facilities and equipment that they require?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, Wolf Creek PCN is one of the more recent ones. They have a tremendous response network there for diabetics in particular. I want to say on record how pleased I am with what they're doing in the Wolf Creek area. In total we see about 39 family physicians in eight clinics serving more than 80 per cent of the residents in that network's catchment area. That's a very good thing.

As for the equipment part, that, too, will come forward in the April 1 budget.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

### Carbon Emissions Reduction

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Walking and cycling have been used throughout the world to reduce car usage, road wear and improve citizen health and community connectivity. This government is doing the oil and gas sector a disservice in terms of meeting our emissions targets when it insists on spending billions on one big-ticket CCS but ignores the smaller initiatives that can have significant, enduring effects. To the Minister of Environment: what is the province doing to encourage more people-oriented initiatives like building cycling lanes and walking trails?

2:20

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate that there may be some environmental benefits to cycling and walking, I'd suggest that the benefits probably accrue more to the cyclers and the walkers. She may want to address that question to the minister of health.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, I think that if they're walking or cycling, they may not be driving, and that should help us.

To the same minister: given that the municipal sustainability initiative has been cut two years in a row and given all the other areas this wonder-fund is supposed to cover for cities, how does the minister expect cities to extract money to pay for environmental programs which are more the minister's responsibility?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we just recently announced a \$2 million contribution to a project jointly managed by AUMA and AAMD and C that will create a centre of excellence for municipalities large and small throughout the province to find opportunities for them to significantly increase their energy efficiency and at the same time decrease their environmental footprint. So while we're not expecting that we'll pay for the initiatives, we certainly will give them the expertise that they need to find the direction that they're going.

**Ms Blakeman:** To the same minister. Well, here's an opportunity. Why doesn't the minister amend the Green TRIP program to include incentives to expand walking and cycling infrastructure?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't necessarily be opposed to doing such a thing, but I do want to point out that the Green TRIP program is designed to reduce in a significant way the carbon footprint. And while I said at the outset that there may be some

marginal benefits from this, I don't think that's the best bang for the buck for this program.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

#### Chronic Wasting Disease

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along the east side of the border hunting is a critical element of the economy. Particularly within the constituency of Battle River-Wainwright hunting is a significant economic driver. As such, ensuring a healthy deer and elk population and plenty of hunting experiences is critical. The threat of chronic wasting disease is a worry to many of my constituents concerned about their livelihood. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: now that hunting season is over, can you provide me and my constituents with an update on the management of the CWD issue?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, we have got, I think, a very solid monitoring program and process in place. After the last hunting season we confirmed that 10 new cases of this disease were found as a result of the program. Now, the disease boundaries have shifted slightly this year a bit south of highway 1 in one case and again a little further west near Wainwright. But the concentration of the disease is still situated around Empress and Edgerton and remains there.

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

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hunters have long advocated that they're the best tools the government has to ensure that deer and elk populations are managed appropriately, which in turn controls the spread and therefore the threat of CWD. I believe they are correct since utilizing them ensures economic stimulus for the region and manages the population. Can the minister indicate if there are any plans to change the policy of utilizing local hunters in the management of CWD?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, in a word, no way. We really believe that hunters have played a very positive role in this, and Alberta hunters have been key to the surveillance of the disease. The last hunting season they submitted about 4,500 heads for testing, and 4,166 of those have been tested. The proof of that is that hunters' value to the province of Alberta relative to the results that we're getting and relative to mitigating the circumstances around this disease is very positive for us. We will continue to work with that fraternity.

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

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's excellent news. We all know that chronic wasting disease is a difficult disease to manage and control, but with more information and monitoring we may increase the chance of successful management. It's important to know, however, whether the CWD has been contained to border communities or if it continues to spread. Is the province expanding its monitoring practices further beyond the border hunt zones to ensure that management practices are in line with the disease and its potential spread?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much. Again, the only wild deer in Alberta that have tested positive for chronic wasting disease have been within about 80 kilometres of the Saskatchewan border total, most of them within 20 kilometres of the Saskatchewan border. The majority of testing is done along the Saskatchewan border. We have to understand also, Mr. Speaker, that testing this disease occurs throughout the province of Alberta with receipt of these heads, and any deer that our officers find that show symptoms of disease are tested also. We continue to monitor this, and we think that with the help of our hunting community we will be successful.

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

#### Signage on Highway Rights-of-way

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Driving from Calgary to Edmonton, one can't help but notice a variety of signs on private property, from semi-trailer billboards to the hay bale towers advertising feed, yet this minister specifically targets antinuclear signs, and his answers have not cleared things up. This issue is not just about removal of signs on private property; it is about a situation where of all the signs out there on the highways of the Peace Country only the signs against nuclear power were specifically targeted. To the minister: why?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you that this hon. member is absolutely wrong. Look, I've told him many times that this department has a policy that we do not allow signs within our right-of-way, and they're noncompliant 300 metres on private land outside the right-of-way. On outside the right-of-way signs we send out letters telling people that they're not compliant and to remove the signs, but we don't remove them. Inside the right-of-way it doesn't matter what's on the sign. If they're not compliant, we will remove them.

**Mr. Kang:** Mr. Speaker, this is about expressing freedom of speech, and it has nothing to do with the right-of-way. It is not right that only the signs expressing opposition to a government policy are removed. We haven't had an answer on this. Perhaps the minister doesn't know why his department is having this removal done. What investigation of this has he undertaken?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, this policy has absolutely nothing to do with freedom of speech. It has to do with noncompliant signs within a right-of-way, and if the signs are noncompliant, it doesn't matter what's written on them; they're going to be removed.

**Mr. Kang:** Those signs were not in noncompliance, Mr. Speaker. When can we and the people of the Peace Country expect to see a public formal review and report on this matter?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, we're looking into some of the claims, but I've got to tell this hon. member: they are noncompliant. We don't allow signs in the right-of-way.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

#### Mountain Pine Beetle Control

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wood shipments out of Alberta are increasing, and the price of dimension lumber is slowly getting better. So much optimism in the forest industry right now, but also so many concerns coming to me from my mills in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable

Resource Development. Can you tell me and give me the assurance that you and your department are doing everything you can to make sure on the ground – not here in Edmonton but on the ground – that work is being done to fight the pine beetle?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, I can assure the member that everything that we can do is being done relative to mountain pine beetle. Of course, this situation changes on a daily and, certainly, yearly basis depending on a number of factors. The hon. member knows very well that influx and in-flight of beetles into Alberta is a major problem that we're faced with. But, yes, we are continuing to put a lot of dollars into this and to put front-line people and staff on the ground. They're there today as we speak, and we continue to work with this problem.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, again to the same minister. This concern is not just in Alberta. It's interprovincial, and there's a federal responsibility. What are you doing with the federal government to assure that there's some partnership in the dollars needed to fight this emergency?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we work very hard to try to convince the federal government that they should have a program in place. In fact, to my knowledge the federal government doesn't have a mountain pine beetle mitigation program. They've come at it with a bit of an ad hoc situation that helps us, to be sure. Very grateful for what they have done. But we continue to work very hard with the federal government, with our department people, dealing with them to try to get them to understand that if this problem leaves the province of Alberta and goes farther east, the federal government does have a very serious problem.

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

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

### 2:30 Health Care Decision-making

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the minister of health announced a surge in a few medical procedures. My question focuses on the ideas that can help cure long-term wait-lists, not Band-aids. This government made a flawed decision to centralize health care decisions in the hands of a few appointed bureaucrats. When will this government realize that taking away decision-making power from local health care administrators was wrong?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, people at the local level have every opportunity to speak to their MLAs to bring those issues forward. They have every opportunity to speak with their local health advisory councils. There are over a dozen of those in place. They have every opportunity to pick up the phone and call my office. There are a number of ways that people can still have direct input. I should also add that I'm on a very aggressive tour of all of Alberta right now, so I'm meeting with a lot of these people, and they can speak to me directly when I arrive there. There are just so many ways to do this.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, that's interesting, but if they don't change this centralized health care system, Albertans will change this government. When this government centralized health care, it blocked competition and innovation. To the minister: does he know that the efficiencies and innovation that his superboard wants to achieve actually came from leading local health care administrators?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** I think I said yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that I'm not so concerned with where good ideas come from. If there's a good idea and we have a chance to review it and we can cost it out and we can look at the benefits of that costing and it makes sense and it improves services and people are happy with that and we can move waiting lists down and we can improve access and we can unclog the system, you can count on us to do that. But it doesn't all happen overnight. One of the great things that we have right now, of course, is the five-year funding plan, which will assure us that the deliverables we seek will be worked on and diligently pursued until they are delivered.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, Mr. Speaker, those are nice words, but he's still missing the point. He places more trust and authority in the hands of a few government-appointed bureaucrats than he does in local health care administrators, who see the flaws and the opportunities in our health care system every day and are blocked when trying to implement new ideas and procedures. Would the minister agree that when the superboard interferes with the implementation of these local initiatives, patient care suffers?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, no, I won't agree because I can tell you with great assurance and with some authority that the people who are working to deliver those important health services are doing a darn good job, and they should be commended for what they're doing. With this six-week rollout we have doctors working extra weekends voluntarily. I mean, we're paying them for it, but they volunteered their service time to step up to the plate. We have people who were working full-time who are working some overtime, we have other people who were working part-time that are working more time, and they should be thanked as well.

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

### Foster and Kinship Care Spaces

**Ms Notley:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we know that 592 foster spaces were lost in Alberta as of March 2009 while 630 new spaces were found. That makes for a net increase of 40 foster and kinship care spaces in Alberta as of March 2009, seven months into the 18-month period discussed by the minister yesterday. Now, talking about spaces that are created without acknowledging those that are lost leads people to draw the wrong conclusions. Will the minister of children's services admit that her claim of 900 new spaces for children in government care . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can be very clear that permanent placement for children is a priority for this ministry and that over the past 18 months the foster care spaces and the kinship care spaces, which, you know, is when a grandmother or an aunt and uncle or whoever is kin to that family looks after the child, are well over 900 spaces. I can get the information, though, for this member over the last number of years and equate that and go through it if you'd like to see a statistical analysis of that.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, to defend this government's cuts to children's services, the minister yesterday led this House to believe that the availability of foster and kinship care spaces had grown enough to accommodate a \$30 million cut in her ministry. Talking about increases without talking about losses is only half the story.

There's an old Yiddish saying that sometimes a half-truth can be a whole lie. Will the minister admit that she only gave us half the truth yesterday?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you very clearly that, as I said previously, foster care spaces have increased, kinship care spaces have increased, and permanent adoptions have increased. In fact, the whole change with the child and family enhancement act is working, and that is where, as you know, previously a worker would go into a home, would remove that child, and often the child would remain in care for a very long time whereas now they work immediately with the family to assist the child being in the home. Those kinds of services are working.

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, it's deceptive to report an increase of 900 new foster spaces without telling people exactly how many spaces have been closed in the same time frame. Now, with nowhere near 900 additional foster spaces – who cares if they're new or old? – the minister's plan to save money on the backs of these fictional homes can't be real. Will she admit that she has no plan to cut \$30 million without hurting the kids she is responsible for taking care of?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I want you to know that the children and youth that are being cared for through this ministry are going to continue to be cared for in the way that they were yesterday, the way they are today, and they will be in the future. Because of the good work that's being done out in the community – there has been so much that has happened with this ministry that I am learning about that has created really something that is just profound for children and youth out in the community, and that's through foster care, kinship care, adoption placement, good support services programs, and as I said, I'll get you the statistical analysis.

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

#### Trade Mission to Washington, DC

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta plan for economic recovery includes a push to become one of the most competitive jurisdictions to do business in the world. Obviously, I've spoken to many Albertans, as I'm sure my colleagues have, who are very supportive of this, but I've also spoken recently with constituents who are a little concerned about how this can be achieved in a time of recession. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. My constituents understand that there may be value in meeting with U.S. officials recently in Washington, DC, but in today's tight economic times how is this a prudent use of tax dollars?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, it's been over a year since a member of the cabinet has actually been to Washington to meet with officials, and we attended, with the Council of the Federation and governors from several states, meetings to talk about the ways that we can expand our interests in energy. We met with others thanks to the ambassador, Gary Doer, and the officials of the White House. We really focused our attention on those people that could provide us assistance.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. I understand the minister met recently with Lisa Jackson, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA has stated that it may go it alone, so to speak, if the U.S. Congress cannot pass

climate change legislation. My question is to the same minister. What are the implications right here in Alberta?

**Ms Evans:** They could be dire if we, in fact, didn't do our due diligence. Ms Jackson spoke to us about the carbon intensive reductions that are necessary. So carbon intensive industries, she indicated, would require reductions. She spoke very eloquently about the fact that the Obama administration and her department, which has some 17,000 workers that are responsible for environmental protection, intend to keep environment front and centre even though jobs and health care are huge for the administration in the United States at this time.

**Mr. Rodney:** My final question is to the same minister. As part of the COF mission the minister attended two round-tables with Premiers and DC policy groups on border management, energy, and the environment. I'm hoping there were concrete benefits or insights that were gained that would help Alberta. Was that indeed the case?

**Ms Evans:** In fact, Mr. Speaker, I think it certainly opened my eyes to the large challenge we have to make sure that America is fully cognizant of our needs here. You know right away when you walk into a room and someone talks about the tar sands that they may not be friendly or disposed towards listening to the kinds of things that we've already done with the clean air technology strategy. We indicated at all junctures that we supported our Prime Minister and the President of the United States to discover better technology, to on a go-forward basis make sure that we followed through with what the Minister of Environment currently is doing, and that is making sure that we're as clean and green and sustainable as possible.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, 19 individual members were recognized today. There were 110 questions and answers: 12 came from the opposition, seven from private government members.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

2:40

#### Members' Statements

(continued)

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

#### Water Management

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In many ways human behaviour is predictable. We want to progress, but we want to do it in the easiest way possible, just as water. But there are consequences when we do not think things through. Our forefathers settled close to sources of readily available water so they could survive. They found ways to store water so that during drought times they had a source of water that would sustain them.

This government's water for life strategy is flawed and lacks the vision and commitment of our forefathers because it does not address the growth of Alberta or the changing climate and the need for increased water storage. We have more water over a shorter period of time and must build the infrastructure to capture and store this precious resource.

Unlike this government, who only focuses on the next election, our forefathers focused on the next generation. When you look at the regions in southern Alberta that have grown and thrived, they have been able to do so because of the ability to capture the value and energy of Alberta's water resources. Calgary, Lethbridge, Fort Macleod, Medicine Hat are just a few of those communities. The diversification and innovation in southern Alberta through water storage and distribution canals has allowed people in industry to

flourish in a part of the province that is semi-arid. We produce a tremendous amount of produce and food products that Albertans enjoy, everything from cattle and corn to grains, legumes, sugar, and potatoes.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, our future food security is often overlooked. It's just as critical as our air, water, and land. This government needs to focus its infrastructure storage on water, H<sub>2</sub>O, not the storage of CO<sub>2</sub>. Albertans know how to do this. We are good stewards of the land, air, and our water, and we know that a government that does not focus on the future food sources, clean air, and water will undermine our quality of life.

As we recognize Scout Week, we need to be mindful of part of their law, to be wise in the use of all resources. I would encourage all the members in this House to visit the website [aipa.org](http://aipa.org) from Alberta Irrigation so that we can make sure that every drop counts and that we are able to enjoy farm-fresh Alberta products.

### Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented on Monday, February 22, 2010. I can advise the House that the petitions comply with Standing Orders 90 through 94. Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one report to table, the appropriate number of copies of Students and Democracy from the Council of Alberta University Students and their five recommendations on how to improve democracy and improve voter turnout amongst our university students.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a report entitled *The Learning Mosaic: A Multiple Perspectives Review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* as well as a summary report of that report. Just so people have an idea what the report is about, the conclusion says that

AISI is an impressive change strategy that is perhaps without parallel in the world today. It contributes to teacher development and educational change in a manner that is stable, steady, and credible among the educators it most seeks to impact. AISI leadership is transparent, responsive, and trustworthy.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, the appropriate number of copies of a document from the Churchill Retirement Community, an assisted living facility in Edmonton. The document provides a list of fees charged to residents for various services.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report by the NDP caucus entitled *Alberta's Health Care: What People Want*. The recommendations in the report are based on public hearings which we held in seven communities around the province. Participants at those hearings showed strong support for

maintaining health care services that are both publicly funded and publicly delivered.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first tabling is with permission from Mr. Keith Wilson on 56th Street and 90th Avenue in Edmonton. Mr. Wilson is writing urging the government to not cut funding for our schools.

The second tabling I have is also with permission from the author, Janice Stefancik, and it was sent to me and the hon. Minister of Education and the hon. Premier. It, too, is urging the government to not cut funding for our schools.

The third tabling I have is a letter that I wrote on December 9, 2009, to the hon. the Premier regarding the cabinet policy committees and how they were set up and requesting the order in council, that the Minister of Education agreed to table in this House forthwith today.

Thank you.

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

**The Speaker:** Point of order. The hon. Government House Leader.

### Point of Order Factual Accuracy

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), the hon. member in tabling indicated that I had agreed to table an order in council. I did nothing of the sort. That's a total misrepresentation and would seek, at the very least, to engage us in debate. It's a misrepresentation. I made no such statement. What I did say is that all orders in council are published.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find that quite interesting. Now, I don't have the benefit of the Blues before me, but certainly in the exchange in question period when I asked the Premier today regarding the appointment to the cabinet policy committees by this government, I thought that I had heard the hon. Minister of Education, who was responding for whatever reason, I don't know, on behalf of the Premier, indicate that not only was there an order in council to set up the 69 individuals to the cabinet policy committees, where we spent \$1.4 million last year paying them, but that it was a published document and was certainly public. My interpretation was that the hon. Minister of Education certainly had no problem tabling that at the appropriate time in the Assembly so that we could see once and for all how this process works.

I don't really think that there's a point of order here, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Well, I think it's certainly clarified now by the words that were used, and the words will be printed in *Hansard*, so all can read that.

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Just a couple of points before we go to Orders of the Day. Tomorrow during Tabling Returns and Reports it will be my intent to table with the Assembly the interim report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. I will not make it available to anyone prior to my tabling it in the House tomorrow during the appropriate mechanism of Tabling Returns and Reports. So, please, hon.

members, don't venture down to my office hoping to get a copy. You'll all get one at the same time, which I think is the fair and open and transparent approach with respect to this matter.

There was a bit of a disruption here in this Assembly during question period today. Pages were totally inappropriate in delivering a bunch of paper because it was delivered without my permission or my knowledge. That should not be taking place, will never take place, and there will be some clarification made by way of an educational process to ensure that doesn't happen again. Members are here in this Assembly to pay attention to one another, to focus on the subject at hand, to be civil and courteous to one another, and not to be disrupted by the movement of paper and people moving and walking behind them in the lanes in which they sit. The hon. member who asked them to distribute the information was not following the traditional protocol of this Assembly.

2:50

## Orders of the Day

### Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

#### Bill 5

#### Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010

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

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ensure that some concerns and questions are put on the record concerning the supplementary supply estimates. It's a lot of money, as the President of the Treasury Board realizes, I'm sure. One of the concerns I'd like to get on the record is how this number has grown over the years. You know, it's not realistic to expect budget perfection. I think we all aim for it, and this president might get there. I don't know.

**An Hon. Member:** He's a good man.

**Dr. Taft:** He's a good man. He's a good man.

We do have some concerns about the trends with supplementary supply estimates. [interjection] Well, there always has to be a qualifier there.

If you were to go back, Mr. Speaker, over the years, you would see that the general trend is quite dramatically upward, although it's not always even. Sometimes it spikes and drops and spike and drops. But if you look at it over the last decade or so, it's more often that this supplementary supply estimate is in the range of a billion dollars or more than it used to be. The extreme would have been 10 years ago when the supplementary supply estimate was about \$30 million, if my figures are right, which is darn near perfection with budgeting. Now we're looking at \$958 million. That's not, of course, the record. The record in the last decade or so was about five years ago when we hit over \$2 billion. I'm trying to remember if that might not have been a result of BSE or something else.

In any case, the general point is that a billion dollars or thereabouts is a terrific fudge factor or a terrific amount of money to have to make up in this sort of supplementary supply. We're always urging the government to refine its budgeting processes, to increase its discipline in controlling budgeting. We understand that there are

lots of things that might come along: mountain pine beetle, BSE, forest fires, floods, those kinds of natural disasters, H1N1. I don't think anybody is going to argue with some extra spending on that. But I think we need to always challenge the government to come as close at the end of the year to meeting its budget targets as is possible. It looks right now like we're close to a billion dollars off, and it's possible that there'll be a second supplementary supply bill before we're all done.

Those are my general comments.

I want to, however, Mr. Speaker, give the government some accolades for moving the budget process up a little bit. I have long been a supporter of that, and I've urged that kind of action from the government. We were in the habit for many years of not passing the budget until well into the fiscal year that the budget addressed. We seem to be improving at least that part of the budgeting process, so perhaps that will also be reflected in greater accuracy at the end of the year. By having the budget this year moved through and passed before the beginning of the fiscal year, then all the agencies that depend on that budget may well be able to plan more effectively for their year and, as a consequence, be more accurate in their financial management.

I'm going to just speak a little bit about the extra funding requested for Health and Wellness here, Mr. Speaker, because it's an awful lot of money, and it's getting folded in with a very large increase in the budget for next year. I'm glad to see that there are special provisions for the H1N1 flu. See how happy I am, Mr. President? Two compliments there. It's still the season of Valentine's.

I'm glad to see that there is a special allocation for H1N1 vaccine costs because it would have truly been unfair to take that out of the regular operating budget of the health care system. I think everybody or most of us, at least, in this Assembly understood that that was more akin to a forest fire or a flood or some other natural disaster, that's dealt with out of separate funds. So that's a good move.

I am concerned with the management of some of the funding for some of the special projects under Health and Wellness, in particular, for example, the surge in expenditures for hip and knee surgeries. That's money that's going to come out of this budget year. It was quite a chunk of money, I believe, a week ago. Now, my concern, Mr. Speaker, is around the administration of those funds. I'm concerned that there be the strictest possible conflict-of-interest policies in place around the allocation of funds to surgeries done in private, investor-driven facilities. That would include organizations like HRC and the cataract surgery clinics in Calgary and some other locations.

My concern is that a substantial part of that money is getting steered toward private, for-profit clinics by people in the public system who actually have a vested interest in those clinics. It's poor management, and it invites abuse. I hope that we have a government here that will bring in strict conflict-of-interest policies because I'm going to be working hard to ensure that those conflicts of interest are not allowed to occur.

It would be really helpful if the President of the Treasury Board could give us some more detail on where the Health and Wellness funding is going. How much, for example, is going to things like air ambulance, municipal ambulance? How is that whole ambulance transfer process going? Is that costing more? Is that driving up some of the costs? Is that one of the issues behind this extra allocation? What's happening to pharmaceutical costs and drug costs? Those historically have been inflating. What about lab costs? Some of those will be probably caught up in the H1N1 allocation, but what's happening in other lab costs? Why are we seeing such a

need for extra funding for Health and Wellness over and above the H1N1 issue?

There's one other issue that I would like to get on the record. I see there's another \$73 million, almost \$74 million, for Transportation. I'm a little surprised at that because, after all, we've heard so much about how estimates for a lot of that work are actually coming in way below what was budgeted. I would be curious if the President of the Treasury Board might be able to explain exactly the dynamic behind the increase in expenditures in Transportation, particularly when we're in a period of real financial restraint.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

3:00

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's with interest that I rise to participate in the debate on Bill 5 this afternoon. We were having a discussion last week on supplementary supply, and it was unfortunately cut short. I, too, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, have questions surrounding the allocation, first off, of \$243 million to Alberta Health and Wellness. Now, it's only last fall that all hon. members from the Assembly and taxpayers read with startled interest the Auditor General's report and realized that there had essentially been an override of financial accountability at Alberta Health Services when the budget in the business plan had not, as I understand the Auditor General's report, been authorized.

Now, we know the fiscal dilemma that Alberta Health Services is in. We know this allocation here is for funding through to March of this year. We know that last year there were also one-time allocations. One only has to look at part 1 of the Alberta Health and Wellness annual report to recognize that there were additional monies allocated. I believe, and I could stand corrected, that it was in the neighbourhood of 300-plus million dollars. The majority of it went to the old Calgary health authority in one form or another. This seems to be a persistent, chronic pattern of this government. Health care services and the delivery of those services certainly is not improving, but we're being asked to give more and more money.

Now we're finding out that amounts of this money, Mr. Speaker, are being used to channel health services or health procedures to private facilities. How much of this is going to go through this \$243 million allocation to private hospitals is a good question. Also, can the minister responsible, in this case the hon. President of the Treasury Board, be confident that the Auditor General's recommendations from last fall have been implemented to ensure that the budgeting process is now being followed?

Certainly, whenever you look at the Alberta Health Services Board and the fact that it may meet for 35 to 40 minutes in public on a monthly basis, that's not good enough, that short period of time. They're spending 9-plus billion dollars, and they should be accountable through the ministries to the Assembly and then through to the taxpayers.

When we look at the past practices, I for one don't have a great deal of confidence in this government to deliver public health care efficiently and effectively. They have failed to date. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has certainly detailed this in the past and detailed it with considerable accuracy, to the point where citizens are now directly questioning whether this government is capable of managing the biggest budget of any respective department.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I also have questions around – and this goes back to the 2008-09 annual report, where on page 3 it is noted that at the end of March last year, in 2009, there was \$1.5 billion from

fourth-quarter results that was transferred. If we go to page 16 of the same report, we will see where in the sustainability fund, another great Liberal idea . . . [interjection] You may laugh, hon. member, but it was past Conservative caucuses that initially rejected that sound fiscal economic idea. Fortunately, one Conservative caucus had the sense to see that it was needed, and you are living on that savings account as we speak.

The additional cash of \$1.5 billion from 2008-09 fourth quarter results will be deposited in the fund in 2009-10. So here we have essentially a \$1.5 billion allocation. I understand that a portion of this was investment income. I would be grateful to know if that was investment income from the general revenue fund or where exactly that investment income has come from. I would like a breakdown of that \$1.5 billion in the course of this debate as to how much was left over or unexpended from various government ministries or programs in that year and brought forward to this year.

Now, that money has been brought forward, Mr. Speaker, but at the same time we are looking for a considerable amount of cash here, in total close to a billion dollars, \$920 million. So that's a lot of money. At one point in the budget year we're getting this amount reallocated or put in the sustainability fund, and then probably six months after the annual report is published, we're before this House looking for two-thirds of that amount back to pay for programs in Health and in Culture and in Employment and Immigration.

One, again, can see the significant negative effects of the recession and why there would be additional funding needed for Employment and Immigration. Tourism, Parks and Recreation is looking for \$12 million. That's at least the amount, if not more, that we will spend at the Winter Olympics promoting this Conservative government. I see it, Mr. Speaker, as a promotion of the government, not of this fine province. Sustainable Resource Development for other reasons is getting additional money for forest fires. Housing and Urban Affairs.

Transportation is certainly an interesting one. I would like to point out that with the Transportation department when you look at the annual report from last year – and hopefully I can get an explanation in the course of the debate from the President of the Treasury Board – in 2008-09 Transportation had unexpended amounts of \$550 million. Now, again, this is taking from Peter to pay Paul. That money was reallocated or shifted ahead into the next year for capital projects, as I understand it, some of it, at least. But here they're looking for \$73 million, Mr. Speaker. So how exactly does this work? If you go to the front of the annual report, you will see where some of the funds that were left over in 2008-09 are set aside for projects that are going to take place in this year and the following year as well, but not all of that money. So I would like an explanation.

Transportation wouldn't be the only department. Infrastructure certainly had a significant amount left over, \$505 million according to my research. Of course, not all of that was turned back into the general revenue fund, but some of it must have been.

I would like to know as we debate and we discuss this advance or supplementary supply: how much does the President of the Treasury Board expect will be left over in unexpended amounts this year? We went through this process last year, and we see quietly in the footnotes \$1.5 billion that was found and put in the sustainability fund. I'm not saying it's a bad idea, but I would just like to have full disclosure of these amounts.

3:10

Again, Mr. Speaker, to the President of the Treasury Board: how much do you anticipate you will have left over at the end of next month, March 31, 2010, from this budget year to put back in the



sustainability fund? I'm not talking about extra investment income or money from the sale of oil and gas leases; I'm talking about unexpended amounts from each and every respective ministry. How much will it be, and will it be an amount equal to or greater than the supplementary budget that we are discussing here this afternoon?

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Comments, questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Mr. Mason:** Yes. Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Are you on the 29(2)(a), or are you on your own?

**Mr. Mason:** I'm on my own.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Go for it.

**Mr. Mason:** Yeah. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 5, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010. This bill is requesting nearly a billion dollars in supplementary supply for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010. That in itself is a breathtaking figure. We're used to using billions when we talk about the finances of our province, but that's a very large amount for supplementary supply.

It includes Advanced Education and Technology; Culture and Community Spirit; Employment and Immigration; Health and Wellness, of course, \$176 million there; Housing and Urban Affairs; Municipal Affairs; well, pretty much every department.

Advanced Education and Technology is requesting \$30 million for student loan disbursements, but at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing tuition fees rise around the province. The government, I think, has an inkling how much extra debt they are asking students to take on in this province, but they're cutting funding in the 2010 budget. They want an extra \$270 million for the University of Alberta centre for interdisciplinary studies. In general, much of the costs are being passed on to students.

We've already seen, if I can turn to Employment and Immigration, where the ministry wants an extra \$129.7 million for income supports due to a higher caseload and a higher cost per case. January already saw the highest income support caseload since 1997. All of these budget lines are cut in next year's budget, especially the line that went most over budget; that is, for people expected to work or working. The budget relies, then, on vague hopes that the recession will end and people will no longer need the same government resources. What guarantees do we have that the government will not be coming back and asking for funding to come back the next year?

Mr. Speaker, I brought this to the attention of the Minister of Transportation last night in estimates. What we've seen in a lot of cases is cuts in one year's budget for specific programs of specific departments and then supplementary estimates to make up, in some cases exceed, the cuts that were made in the budget. So it makes it very hard for us to see what exactly the budget numbers mean. I at one point said to the Minister of Transportation: what do the numbers in the budget mean? When you cut it in the budget and then you go back and you replace it with supplementary supply and then you cut it again in the budget the next year, what does the budget actually mean?

I think there is in some cases a misuse of supplementary estimates in order to create the impression in a budget that spending is actually under control. The government is cutting spending in some areas and then replacing the money after the budget is approved. I think

that many of these programs require more funding. Not all, but many of them do require funding, especially when you're in a recession and people are hurting. It doesn't make sense to me to use supplementary estimates in this way.

Using Transportation as an example, they want an extra \$73 million, much of which is going to programs which were cut last year and will be cut again in next year's budget. So are these cuts being used to hide what the government is actually spending? I don't think that that's an appropriate thing to do. There are many programs that deserve proper funding, and I would like to see those things funded but funded, you know, up front and in an honest manner.

Mr. Speaker, we've got \$150 million for Sustainable Resource Development, including \$130 million for firefighting. That's similar to a figure last year. I think it's a fair assumption to make that we're going to have forest fires most summers, and if it's an ongoing, predictable expense, it should be included in the budget and not just used by supplementary supply.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to go into detail on all of these departments, but I do think that the government needs to reduce its dependence on supplementary supply because I think it masks a bigger problem, which is the inability to budget accurately and then live within the budget that's provided. It's an excuse for, I think, a little bit of breakdown on discipline. In saying that, I'm not suggesting that we need to make widespread cuts to important services that people need or any cuts at all. I am simply saying that it means that the government is getting sloppy in its budgeting process and that it undermines the value of a budget document.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments, I will take my seat. Before I do, though, I wonder if I could request of you permission to distribute . . .

**The Speaker:** Why don't we deal with 29(2)(a) and get the bill out of the way, and then I'll recognize you.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Additional speakers?

Then the hon. President of the Treasury Board to conclude the debate.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to acknowledge the constructive comments from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and in fact I do take very seriously the opportunity to maintain a very close watch on government spending. It is easy to ascertain from this particular document that if you take out the spending from the '08-09 accumulated health deficit ending March 31, '09, if you take out the capital that was used in most cases to access federal funding programs, deal with the H1N1 and the fires, we are dealing with less than half of 1 per cent of our budget. It's actually smaller than that, but just given that the opportunity for math is not something that they need to waste much more time on, I would at this time close debate in second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would respectfully request permission to distribute copies of the report prepared by the NDP caucus called What People Want, health care in Alberta. It is a result of public hearings that we conducted in seven cities around the

province in the fall and a number of public meetings that we've held recently around the province. It represents the views of many individuals and organizations that are involved in the health care field in our province.

### 3:20 Statement by the Speaker

#### Distribution of Items to Members

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the background to this is that a little while ago, before we had Orders of the Day, I rose and I basically said that a certain thing had happened in the House today. One of the things that's really important is how we deal with decorum in the House, and there are a variety of ways that groups and agencies and individuals get their message to us. Sometimes you'll receive in your offices prior to 1:30 of the day a ribbon, a pin from a group, a cause: it's HIV day, it's awareness day, it's daffodil day, it's Red Cross day, or something like this. We wear these ribbons, and we wear these pins.

Sometimes they come to my office and ask me to put them on the desks of hon. members, and depending what they are, we invariably say yes because they're small and they're not disruptive. But on other occasions there are bigger packages that groups want to have delivered to MLAs. We had a situation yesterday with the Girl Guides. Basically, they said that they wanted all members to have some cookies, so we said: sure, they could be circulated. But they could only be circulated after, essentially, Orders of the Day were called so that it was not disruptive during the Routine and anything else.

Then there are some other things that, basically, I've said, no, can never be put on members' desks. Now, I've had requests made by individuals in the past to have samples of tainted meat put on the desk of every member to highlight a cause. When the pork industry was really, really down and piglets were literally being given away, I had groups advocating their promotion of the price of pork to give every MLA in this Assembly a piglet, and would I allow them to put it on their desks in the Assembly? One other member in the past has come very genuinely, very enthusiastically, saying: "Look, we have to do everything we can to promote the SPCA. I'd like to give every MLA a kitten and have it placed on their desks." Well, okay. The answer to those was no, but there are other ways of doing this.

Now, there's a great way of getting the message through. If an individual member wants to convey an envelope of information to other members, ask my office, let me make sure that it's appropriate, and we can deliver it after Orders of the Day are called so that there's no major interruption and disturbance of the Routine. You're all supposed to be focused on question period and listening to one another and all these other things that are very, very important.

Unfortunately, something got through. A member went and got the pages to go and do it, which was not the way it was supposed to have been done, so then the pages had to go back and retrieve these documents. The Sergeant-at-Arms, you must have them under lock and key someplace, under an embargo. Well, first of all, would you have them returned to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood now? He's dutifully asked for the appropriate process, he's got all of his envelopes back, and we'll ask the pages now to distribute them to all members so that they're least disruptive and interruptive of the process of the Routine in the House, and love will prevail.

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Second thing. I've now had an opportunity to look at the Blues with respect to the exchange, the point of order from the Government House Leader and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the Government House

Leader is absolutely correct. There's absolutely nothing in the Blues that suggests that he said that he was going to be tabling any OC. When you stood up, you said you understood. Okay, we deal with it. But the point was correctly raised by the Government House Leader, and a point of order would have been upheld. Again love is in the air, so let's go forward.

#### 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 18: Mr. Hancock]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to take the opportunity to afford a few comments with respect to the Speech from the Throne delivered most graciously by His Honour the Hon. Norman L. Kwong, the Lieutenant Governor, and start, as others in the House have done, by thanking the Lieutenant Governor for his years of service to this province as Lieutenant Governor and for providing both a sense of humour and graciousness to the office that has really served the office well and, therefore, served Albertans well.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne addressed a number of topics that I think are very important not only to my constituents but to all Albertans. One of the first substantive portions of the Speech from the Throne deals with Alberta's resource-based economy, which "brings with it one of the most volatile revenue streams in North America, providing surpluses in good times but prone to sudden economic reversals." I think that statement in the throne speech is extremely important for us, positioning us as we go forward, first of all, to recognize that we do have a resource-based economy in the province, that the oil and gas industry particularly but also the forestry industry are subject to world-based commodity markets and are subject to a high volatility not only with respect to price but also with respect to the quantity that's needed from time to time in the world economy.

As a prudent government in the province of Alberta with that type of an economy, there are two things that really speaks to. One is to ensure that when the economy is working well and when our resource-based industry, particularly our carbon industry and oil and gas, is in a high-price mode, the revenue which comes from the sale of that asset is used wisely and invested wisely not just for current Albertans but also for future Albertans. I want to speak to that. The second thing which it points out to us most urgently is the need for us to make sure that we look to the future economy of the province and what the foundation of that future economy will be. More than one constituent has said to me that they wish that we could broaden the base of the economy so that we weren't so affected by the swings in the oil and gas prices.

In saying that, I think it's necessary to clear up one of the fundamental questions that many Albertans ask. They ask: "What happened to the money? Where did the money go? We had a very solid economy a couple of years ago with a good revenue stream from oil and gas. Why didn't we save it?" When I talk to Albertans

who ask that question and tell them what's actually happened, it's a message which a lot of Albertans I don't think have heard, that we've actually done a very good job with that revenue stream.

When you look at the record, Alberta has paid off \$23 billion to \$25 billion in debt. That's an investment in future Albertans. That debt was accumulated in earlier years both in terms of program spending and in terms of spending on infrastructure, but it was a debt which would have burdened future generations of Albertans in terms of paying it off. So I think getting that debt paid off was a very prudent thing to do.

We've built \$40 billion in enduring infrastructure. We've created a platform for the province to move forward in terms of our postsecondary institutions, in terms of our schools, in terms of our transportation infrastructure, roads, particularly. There's a significant investment that will help to continue to build the future economy and build the future of the province. There is an appropriate place to take money from the sale of an asset, the oil and gas asset that's owned by Albertans, and invest it in a multigenerational infrastructure. I think that's important.

We saved \$17 billion in the sustainability fund because of the recognition that in a volatile economy there will be downswings and that when there are downswings, Albertans want to be protected from the impact of that downswing over a period of time. The \$17 billion that we have in the sustainability fund is doing exactly that right now. We don't have to have a knee-jerk reaction. We don't have to wrench the economy and the community back. We don't have to cut back on important areas like health care and education in order to be fiscally prudent and to stop from building that deficit for future Albertans. So the \$17 billion is well set aside.

Then an additional \$8 billion has been contributed to the heritage savings trust fund and associated endowments. I'm particularly proud, Mr. Speaker, of the access to the future fund, with a little over a billion dollars – I'd hoped that it would grow to \$3 billion by now – which is invested in an endowment fund which will help to fuel future learning potential for young Albertans. You could say the same about the billion dollars or so that's been invested in the ingenuity fund and an extra billion, I believe it is, that was invested in the heritage savings medical research fund. Each of those endowments are funds which drive the future economy by driving our knowledge base, and that's a very, very important message.

**3:30**

I think that when you add all that up and see that there's been \$90 billion not wasted, not dissipated but which has served to do exactly what Albertans would have wanted it to do – to pay off the debt, to put us on a sound fiscal footing, to invest in the future infrastructure needed for the future economy, and to invest in the future knowledge base which is needed for the future economy – Mr. Speaker, I think a very good record. When we start the throne speech and see the comment about Alberta's fiscal advantage and the acknowledgement of the volatile revenue streams, I think it's really important to point out that there has been a very, very strong fiscal record in Alberta, using the resources that Alberta has to invest in the future of Alberta.

The other piece that I wanted to focus on, Mr. Speaker, is later on under the Increasingly Competitive in a Global Economy section of the throne speech, the statement that "Albertans know that a good education is an essential foundation to prepare for the future." That is an exceedingly important statement. We are moving into an era, well, we're well into the era, well into the 21st century now, 10 years into it, where the world is getting smaller. Alberta has always traded out into the world and always will trade out into the world because we are a relatively small population, but we're not always going to have the benefit of trading out into the world just with our

resource base. Oil and gas, as we can see now, the carbon-based energy, is increasingly coming under fire with respect to the environmental issues around greenhouse gases and particularly carbon dioxide, and more and more effort is being put into finding renewable sources of energy.

As we trade out into the world, it's not just the export of our oil and gas products. It's not just the export of raw forestry products. It's what we do with our products and how we use the benefit of those products to prepare our students and our economy to compete in a knowledge-based world – adding value to our resource products, adding value to our agricultural products – but also moving to the biosciences and the life sciences and being able to trade out into the world in the service industries, providing expertise.

Again, this is not new for Alberta. Alberta has led the world in the past on environmental technologies. We've shipped environmental technologies and knowledge about environmental sustainability all around the world. We've certainly shipped knowledge with respect to our oil and gas industry, tertiary and quaternary production, to various places in the world where they've exploited their oil and gas resources perhaps too quickly, resulting in problems. It's knowledge from Alberta that has gone to help them to recoup those areas.

It's also knowledge which will allow us to further exploit those resources that we have because I think it's fair to say that in most of the conventional fields, not only in this province but right around the world, we're only able to exploit about 25 to 35 per cent of the resource that's there. Technology, including how we increase pressure on oil wells through the injection of carbon dioxide, solving two problems at once, is very, very important to us.

The statement that a good education is an essential foundation to prepare for the future couldn't be more true than right here in Alberta, and it's for that reason that we really do need to focus on how we ensure that every single Albertan has the opportunity to maximize his or her potential, that every Alberta child has a good educational opportunity to move from where they are now to where they can be, to find out what they're good at and to be able to develop that potential. That's what we're working towards, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta.

Over the course of the last year we've talked extensively about Inspiring Education. Inspiring Education had two basic purposes. The first and perhaps the most important one was to have Albertans talk about the value of education to our community and our society and to understand that without education we are at peril. Without education in a world that's moving more and more to technology, where knowledge and information are available to more and more people and where the ability to use that knowledge and information in appropriate ways is becoming so important, those that do not have the capacity or the ability to operate in that type of a world will fall behind.

We've seen all over the world examples where economies have moved ahead, but not all the people have moved ahead with the economies, so the wide diversity in economic opportunity, the wide diversity in quality of life has created a strain on civil society. That's not what we want for our province and for our country. It's imperative that we have education as a value in our community, education as a value in our families, and education as a value in our province.

We have a very cosmopolitan community here, with people with backgrounds from all over the world. We live together here in peace and harmony better than anyplace in the world, and we can continue to do that if we make sure that every Albertan, whether their family has been here for generations or whether they're just new arrivals, whether they're new arrivals coming with the benefit of education

and the benefit of income or whether they're coming as a refugee, has that opportunity to find their potential, to maximize that potential, to grow up to be able to take care of themselves and their families, and to contribute back to their community as a full citizen.

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be more important, in my view, in this throne speech than the focus on education as an essential foundation to prepare for the future, and I think what we're doing in Inspiring Education and raising the societal value for education by having that discussion front and centre is so important.

The second piece, of course, is important as well, and that's where we talk about what it means to be an educated Albertan in the year 2029. That's important, Mr. Speaker, because most of us are experts on education because we all went through the system some 40 years ago, well, maybe some a little later than that. It has been a long time since most of us have been in the classroom, yet I'd hazard a guess that if we went into a classroom today, most of us would recognize it very fondly. It hasn't changed very much. Yes, there's maybe a Smart board up at the front of the room, a whiteboard where there used to be a blackboard, but beyond that, the essential formula of education has not changed significantly over the years, yet our world has changed significantly.

It's been 15 years now that we've had access to the World Wide Web, and now we're into Web 2, and we're into very, very robust technologies where people can have access to information. They can basically go anywhere in the world, see anywhere in the world, and it's moving rapidly, so we do need to ask what it means to be an educated Albertan in the year 2029. What is it that our children are going to have to know to be able to participate in that global economy, to be able to be citizens of a global community as well as participate in a local economy and be citizens in their local community?

It doesn't mean that what we're doing now is wrong. Alberta is recognized as having one of the best education systems in the world. I think it's fair to say that regardless of how you measure it, people from around the world coming to see what we're doing basically indicates that that statement is correct, that people do recognize Alberta as having one of the best education systems in the world. That's great for today, but if we stand still, if we don't recognize that there's a need to change as the world changes, that we need to examine new pedagogy, that we need to examine how we use technology in education, not use technology as education but how we use the tool to make sure that our children can have those advantages and be among the best in the world and continue to be among the best in the world, then we will lose the opportunity to have the quality of life that we want not just for ourselves but for all Albertans. We will have that problem of a civil society which is riddled because there's too wide a gap between those who have and those who don't have.

I may be accused of being passionate about education, in which case I would plead guilty, Mr. Speaker. I may be accused of being single-minded about education. I don't think I'm totally single-minded about it, but I am single-minded about the concept that education is the foundation and is fundamental to our success . . . [Mr. Hancock's speaking time expired] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Time is so short.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

**Mr. Denis:** It seemed to me, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Minister of Education was mid-sentence. I wonder if he'd like to complete his sentence.

**The Speaker:** Hon. minister, you wish to comment?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, the time for questions and answers is so short, and there's so much more to be said. I think I'll leave it there.

3:40

**The Speaker:** Others to participate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to . . .

**The Speaker:** Sorry. We're under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Bhullar:** Oh. We're still doing that. Well, in that case I will take the privilege that I've been afforded as a member of this Assembly to ask the member a question and the opportunity to ask him a question.

Sir, many of the international experts that visited Alberta and spoke at the Inspiring Education conference commented on how this was a process that is not taking place in very many jurisdictions throughout North America. They said that this sort of open and transparent dialogue with the citizens, asking them for input on what that future Albertan looks like and how the system should reflect enabling such future Albertans – they said that that doesn't happen. My question to you. We've set a very large stage. We've gotten praise, essentially, from some of the world's best thinkers in education. How, sir, are we going to ensure that we walk the walk when it comes down to looking at the Inspiring Education report?

**The Speaker:** Hon. minister, if you wish to respond.

**Mr. Hancock:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm so glad he asked that question. I should have thought of getting to that point because it is important for us to lay out for Albertans that the discussion is not over and that it can never be over, that we need to continue the discussion on an ongoing basis of how we inspire education.

We have issues in education in this province. For example, the ministers of education across the country, the Council of Ministers of Education, are meeting in Toronto next week. One of our agenda items is always: how do we eliminate the gap in success between First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students and other students? There are issues that we need to deal with, so we need to keep the discussion first and foremost.

In Alberta, specifically following up on this, we expect the report from the task force on Inspiring Education imminently, and then we will be developing what would have been called in the old days before technology a white paper to frame the issues for discussion. We're using technology so that it can be a robust discussion across the province on the issues that come out of the discussion, but there will be more things that we need to deal with.

What are the physical platforms that we need in terms of the infrastructure for education? What kind of curriculum is necessary to move from a content base and a knowledge base to an innovation and creativity and skills base? What does it mean for our pedagogy? How do our teachers teach in a new learning environment? The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere touched on that in his comments last Thursday. What does it mean for pedagogy in the change? There's a lot more work to be done, a lot more discussion to happen, and of course the School Act or the revision of the school act, the education act, whatever it ends up being called, which will come back to the session in the fall.

**The Speaker:** Others?

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to participate.

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to address this Assembly on behalf of the Edmonton-Calder constituency in response to the Speech from the Throne. I would like to touch on a few key priorities outlined in the speech that I believe are crucial to all Albertans, priorities that my constituents care about, like fiscal responsibility, health care, infrastructure, and the funding for education.

Edmonton-Calder is a blue-collar constituency with a proud history of planes, trains, and automobiles. Mr. Speaker, I was born and raised in this constituency, and I face the same issues as my constituents. Edmonton-Calder residents work hard to provide for their families. They must always strike the right balance between spending and saving, and they must create a budget that allows them to get the most out of their incomes. When times are tough, many individuals will cover a shortfall with savings because it's smarter than taking what amounts to a cash advance on a credit card.

The government of Alberta is using its savings in the budget of 2010. By offsetting this year's deficits with savings from the sustainability fund, we will not see the devastating cuts to priority services that many Albertans fear, nor will we do what most jurisdictions do, which is borrow to cover operations. Mr. Speaker, my constituents cannot afford this to happen.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

As the deputy chair of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee I am reassured by the savings mandate of this government for future generations. Our rainy-day fund, the sustainability fund, is a second useful tool. Our rainy days are near an end, and we have put Alberta in the best possible position for sustainable recovery.

Albertans have worked hard to stimulate growth and development in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. They want to see their tax dollars go to further protect health care and education funding, just like the personal incomes that they manage. They do not want to burden their children's generations with servicing debt payments. It is important for us to help all Albertans by funding priority areas, especially with some of our most vulnerable, senior citizens. Edmonton-Calder is home to seven major senior citizens' homes: Shepherd's Care, Rosslyn lodge, Venta Care, Extencicare, Rosedale, Lions Kensington, and the Kipnes Centre for Veterans. Shepherd's Care Vanguard recently received \$3 million in additional funding this year for 29 new spaces. This is incredible news for the seniors in my constituency.

Are there any other concerns that need to be addressed for this group? The majority of seniors are on a fixed income and cannot be burdened by an increase in health care expenses. Over the past years many seniors in Edmonton-Calder have expressed their concerns with the future of PDD funding. One of my constituents, Mr. Bill Shillabeer, is a senior who has a daughter in her 30s living in a group home. Bill is very concerned about who will take care of his daughter when he is gone. Mr. Speaker, this is a concern that many Albertans in this position have, and as a government we must continue to support the services and programs that Bill and his daughter need.

Health care can be identified by the majority of Albertans, not just seniors, as the number one priority in this budget. This has not changed from my parents' generation or from the generation before that, Mr. Speaker. This government has always strived to eliminate barriers to accessibility and affordability of health care in Alberta,

and it will continue to do so. New challenges continue to emerge, but we will manage as we have always managed.

An important priority that was outlined in the Speech from the Throne for my constituents is the spending for infrastructure. The \$20.1 billion in infrastructure spending outlined in Alberta's three-year capital plan will help provide my constituents with jobs, and for this I am thankful. Approximately 60 per cent of Edmonton's industrial land is in Edmonton-Calder. To connect to this industry, we rely on sound infrastructure. Infrastructure spending not only creates jobs for my constituents but allows Edmonton-Calder to continue to be the centre for air, rail, and road transportation within the capital region.

This infrastructure spending can also go towards building new educational institutions in this province. To postsecondary institutions in Edmonton-Calder, like NAIT, it can mean expansion. To my elementary, junior high, and high schools it can mean smaller classes, better tools, and instruction that is student focused.

I am confident that this government will continue to make education a priority so that future generations can build on the innovation and technology that Albertans have seen in the last century. I'm a member of the board of directors of Alberta Innovates: Technology Futures, and I look forward to being part of the future innovation. This structure will give Alberta the necessary tools, education, and technologies it needs to break into new markets and then to increase its competitive advantage.

Mr. Speaker, all of the key priorities I have mentioned today need to remain a focal point for this province in the years to come. By doing so, we can create a sustainable province that serves the best interests of its residents both in good times and in bad.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the Speech from the Throne. I guess a Speech from the Throne can be considered to be in parallel with a state of the union. I met somebody not too long ago who gave me an example of what a ruler some few hundred years ago used to do to assess the state of his kingdom. I found that to be very interesting, to say the least. What this particular ruler used to do was dress up as a beggar. He would ensure that nobody could recognize him and go and see how fellow citizens treated somebody that was so vulnerable. He didn't go to see how a specific agency or a religious leader and so on treated this vulnerable person. He went to see what the average person on the streets in those days thought of and how they treated these individuals.

Mr. Speaker, that really inspired me to consider the state of our province and our nation in many different respects. I think that in this House we have discussions very often on the policy and the financial implications of what we discuss in this Assembly. We talk about the budget, and we have great stories to tell, Mr. Speaker. We've improved the fiscal position by almost \$50 billion while maintaining low taxes; \$23 billion in debt was paid off, and nearly \$25 billion was saved. We have a \$17 billion sustainability fund. I think that is good news.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, we have a commitment to health care, I think, that signals how much value we place on health care in this province, but we also present a very realistic outlook that says that we know Albertans expect better when it comes to health care, and so does the government. So we'll aim to get there.

In addition, 100 new police officers is, I think, a wonderful item in keeping with our safe communities priorities.

We'll meet and surpass our 14,000 child care spaces commitment, that the Premier made, which I think is profound news.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go a little bit further and reflect on our society as a whole. I'd first like to just recognize the fact that I think people in Alberta and in Canada do not – do not – give thanks enough for living in a free and just and secular democracy. I think that if we just look at some international occurrences over the last number of months, we should be giving thanks for being Albertan and Canadian.

The very concept of building codes, Mr. Speaker, and safety codes ensuring construction is safe is something that we should take a great deal of pride in. Ask the people of Haiti how much they wish more of their structures were built with such codes. Again, such a small thing that we take for granted but something that is so profound.

Mr. Speaker, next I want to reflect on integration. I firmly believe that we as a nation are no stronger in our diversity unless we integrate. I think the truth of Canada is not realized if we are divided, if we keep up the artificial borders that surround us. If we continue to see difference, the potential of our diversity is not realized. With that, I think we must do a couple of things. One is to look at what unites us, and the second is looking at what divides us.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at what divides us, I think each of us needs to look at our pasts. Whether we're new immigrants or old immigrants, whether we're immigrants or the children of immigrants or the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of immigrants, we need to ask ourselves if there are any aspects of our past, any beliefs or stereotypes or myths from our past, that we bring with us today. Is there anything from our past that is not contributing in a positive light to the unity of our citizenship?

I think this requires very honest dialogue with ourselves, ourselves as individuals, ourselves as family units, as local communities, and broader. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because these stereotypes and myths that humanity far too often keeps perpetuating lead to polarizing politics, where we continue to have this us and them mentality, where one group sees themselves in one way and fails to recognize something good in another. This sort of polarizing politics I think comes about when the leaders of the day have no vision that is grand enough to capture the positive attention of their citizens. As a result, people stoop to the lowest common denominator, and they try to find divisions, real or not, to separate and divide people.

We should be very fortunate that in this nation it does not happen as much as it happens in other parts of the world. In other parts of the world these divisions lead to true harm – physical harm, mental harm, emotional harm, sexual abuse, and sexual assault – all because people see difference. This harm, Mr. Speaker, led to me seeing something this morning. I woke up to an e-mail from a human rights organization in the U.S. outlining what they believed happened where the Taliban have killed a few Sikh youth in Pakistan. Why? Because they could capitalize on difference. Because they could capitalize on difference. Because the leaders of the day throughout the world may lack true vision and true compassion, they resort to difference. It's disgusting. It's absolutely disgusting.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we must look at what unites us, and that is a conversation that we can have for a long period of time. That is a conversation that can uplift each of us, but we just don't have it enough. We don't have it enough in this Legislature, we don't have it enough in this nation, we don't have it enough in the media because it's easier to divide, to polarize.

If we look at what unites us, I am inspired by a story that I read of a Rwandan genocide survivor. She wrote in her book that she refuses to see those that killed her family, her friends, and thousands

of her fellow people through a lens of hate. She says: I refuse to give them that power because if I give them that power, they win. She says: if I give them the power to hate them, they win. I think she is a profound human being, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if I could have such compassion and such depth, but I think she has set the standard for each of us. If she can look at those that butchered so many of her countrymen through a lens of compassion and say, "If we are to move forward, if we are to have harmony, then we must see no difference," then I think that each of us can do our own little parts.

Mr. Speaker, we have profound examples here. I had the absolute privilege of meeting Major Harjit Singh Sajjan, who was the first officer wearing a turban in the Canadian Forces. In 1989 he joined the forces, and I am in awe of this man. I'm in awe because he joined the forces at a time when Sikh people were still having debates on whether or not the turban could be allowed in the RCMP. I'm in awe of him because he's served in Afghanistan twice, and I'm in awe of my country because of what he represents in Afghanistan. He said that the people of Afghanistan saw him as a symbol of democracy that works. When the people of Afghanistan saw this fellow, who looks more like them than the rest of the soldiers, who wears the Canadian flag on his arm, they saw that democracy works, that having a secular democracy works, that having the rule of law works, that having equality works.

4:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, you can be safe while being a minority. You can live in peace. You can enjoy opportunities. You can have the freedom to create your own destiny. You can be protected by laws in the book as well as those that must uphold them. You can be safe in the hands of another. You don't need to fear those that are different. He shows that you don't need power. Harjit Sajjan is an example of that for these people, that you don't need power and majority. You don't need more wealth than somebody else to be protected.

There are thousands of stories such as this that show that Canada works, that Alberta works. We need to spread this message by example throughout the world, Mr. Speaker – throughout the world – and it's here in this very Assembly that such inspiring ideals should arise, yet it's often not the case. We are often lost in our own theatre, which, I must confess, I've done myself a few times. It reminds me a little of recess. I think I enjoy it now more than I did when I was a child.

Mr. Speaker, these are but a couple of examples of what is so profound about us. I really hope that we are able to reflect on this a little more. I really hope that we're able to tell these stories a little more. We have greatness all around us. The hope that we need is all around us. It's not hidden in a corner. It's not showcased on prime-time television. Yes, during this time, during the Olympics, we'll see that hope on the Olympic podium, but more often the hope is amongst our people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today in support of the Speech from the Throne so graciously delivered by our Lieutenant Governor, His Honour Norman Kwong. Before I discuss the throne speech, I would like to take time to thank His Honour and his wife, Mary, for both their wise and kind words and their years of dedicated service to our province.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne highlighted many of this government's priorities, including strong communities and a healthy environment. Others have spoken on numerous issues outlined in the Speech from the Throne, and I've enjoyed them all. In my response I would like to focus on the province's goals to build the transportation infrastructure required to sustain current and future growth and to find new ways to improve and protect the environment.

Mr. Speaker, building new roads provides jobs and is an excellent way to boost the economy both today and in the future. Our goal is to provide safe and efficient transportation networks throughout the province and into other provinces, territories, and states. Transportation infrastructure, or roads, acts as corridors for linking trade, investment, people, and new ideas both in commerce and in tourism. Roads connect us to markets, connect us to our friends and families and other places, and connect us to our natural environment.

Our natural environment is one of our greatest tourism assets. People need or desire to get out of their urban environments from time to time to connect with the outdoors: the prairies, the parklands, the mountains, and also with lakes, rivers, and streams. To get to these places, we need roads that are safe, reliable, and in the right places.

The throne speech clearly stated:

We are working toward a western economic partnership with British Columbia and Saskatchewan to create Canada's largest boundary-free trade and investment market.

It also says:

Alberta's agriculture and agrifood industries are key and sustainable economic drivers of our province. We are a responsible producer of safe, high-quality food products that are in demand all over the world, but we need to break into new markets and beat the competition from other countries that export agricultural products.

Much of this export-bound produce travels by road to ports in Vancouver, travelling through the Kicking Horse Pass on highway 1, the Yellowhead Pass on highway 16, and even some through the Crownst Pass on highway 3. These may be the best roads we have now, but for most of our transportation needs there could be another route.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the main part of my comments today, which is an important issue to my constituents in Lacombe-Ponoka and especially to constituents in the Rocky Mountain House area and many other Albertans and residents of Saskatchewan that live east of central Alberta, and that is the matter of finishing the final link of the route through the Howse Pass. More specifically, the Howse Pass is a perfect example of how trade corridors were the foundation of this country's history and will be part of Alberta's future.

The Howse Pass, which could be an extension of the David Thompson highway, is located on the border of British Columbia and Alberta. It has a long history in our province. Beginning at the junction of the North Saskatchewan and Howse rivers, it follows the Howse River to the confluence of the Freshfield, Forbes, and Conway creeks to the Alberta-British Columbia border. From there it continues through Crown lands controlled by the province of British Columbia to the junction of the Blaeberry River and Cairnes Creek, which is near Golden, B.C. It was part of the Kootenay Trail, linking the eastern slope of the Rockies with the Columbia valley, a traditional aboriginal transportation route for many years, probably even many centuries.

Europeans didn't arrive on the scene until about 200 years ago. In 1807 David Thompson and a North West Company party first used the pass, which was then subsequently used by the Canadian fur traders to explore and establish a post west of the Rockies. The pass was named after Joseph Howse, a Hudson's Bay Company employee

who first crossed the pass in 1809. In 1871 Walter Moberly, a surveyor for the Canadian Pacific Railway, concluded that the Howse Pass was the best location for a railway line because of its lower elevation and a shorter distance. In spite of this, on April 2, 1872, prior to the 1872 federal election, the federal government from thousands of miles away, in Ottawa of course, adopted the Yellowhead Pass over the Howse Pass by an order in council. So the Howse Pass was rejected at that point. A leading reason given at the time was to leave open a variety of harbour location options. I just wonder sometimes if the politics of the day may have had an impact on that decision. If you just go back to your history books, in 1872 you'll find that there was a railway scandal that actually caused the Prime Minister of the day to resign.

By 1918 the Alberta-British Columbia interprovincial survey concurred with Moberly. They said – and this is a quote as well – that the Howse Pass is of a lower altitude than Kicking Horse by 319 feet and has no steep approaches and will some day be found suitable for a trunk motor road from the Columbia to the prairies, the feasibility of using the pass for such a road or for a railway having already been established. End of quote. So by that time, 1918, motor cars were more common – they weren't even in existence in 1872 – and they established that this would be a great route.

Mr. Speaker, last week my wife, Pauline, and I travelled the David Thompson highway on our way to Vancouver, and it reminded me of the very first time I travelled the David Thompson highway. It was about 1966. The road was under construction, so we actually travelled on detours, which were no more than dirt trails through the forest along the river near Saskatchewan River Crossing. I was probably among the very first people to actually travel by car all the way from Nordegg to highway 93 to the junction of Saskatchewan River Crossing.

Mr. Speaker, over a hundred years have passed since these decisions. Some of the factors for determining location have changed, and new transportation issues are at hand as we move forward. There is potential for this pass to be part of Alberta's future transportation infrastructure and contribute to a healthy environment and a more competitive transportation network.

4:10

Howse Pass is an example of a road that would initiate economic growth and reduce our impact on the environment. This route is through a fairly level area, and it passes through the lowest land point between Mount Assiniboine and Mount Columbia. It is a direct connection from Saskatchewan River Crossing to near Golden, British Columbia. It would extend the province's highway 11, which is the David Thompson highway, over the Continental Divide to the Trans-Canada highway in B.C.

Mr. Speaker, there are many benefits to the construction of the Howse Pass. Building this pass would reduce fuel consumption and carbon emissions as Howse Pass shortens the driving distance from central Alberta to Vancouver by about 100 kilometres. About 80 per cent of CO<sub>2</sub> in the transportation footprint comes from tailpipes, and reducing the drive to cross over the Rocky Mountains can significantly reduce this impact. The pass could be an alternative route for travel and transportation of good when the Yellowhead or Kicking Horse passes are closed due to landslides, accidents, or frequent avalanches.

Some critiques of the pass are evident, but they can be overcome. For instance, part of the pass goes over Banff national park, and there is a legitimate concern for the wildlife there. The animal overpasses that have successfully been built over highway 1 near Lake Louise and Banff are excellent models of a structure that could be built on the Howse Pass and could be much more creative if built as the highway is being constructed.

Mr. Speaker, care for our environment and for our national parks is important to our government. Traffic diverted to the Howse Pass highway will travel through Banff national park for a mere 34 kilometres. On the highway 1 route traffic travels 126 kilometres through the Banff and Yoho national parks, and on highway 16 traffic travels 76 kilometres through Jasper national park, a mere 34 kilometres through the Howse Pass. Mr. Speaker, protecting our environment, reducing our carbon footprint, and conserving energy are important.

An independent cost-benefit study for a Howse Pass highway was completed in October 2005 by Schollie Research & Consulting in Red Deer. This study was funded by the Clearwater county, the town of Rocky Mountain House, the Lacombe county, and the government of Alberta. This economic feasibility study supported construction of the Howse Pass highway as the entire central Alberta region would benefit from net contribution to the economy. It will basically bring central Alberta and regions as far away as Saskatoon at least a hundred kilometres closer to markets.

As His Honour stated in the Speech from the Throne, “a strong economic recovery requires an Alberta that is constantly striving to be better, stronger, and smarter.” To increase our competitiveness in the global economy, the federal and provincial governments should work collaboratively towards the construction of Howse Pass. Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, will look for ways to make our economy more competitive in a very challenging and aggressive world-wide economy. To improve the competitive advantage of many of our products produced in both Alberta and Saskatchewan, we need to remove barriers to our markets, the most obvious barrier being the expansive portion of mountain transportation. The future economy will see emphasis on new ways to increase safety, efficiency, and practicality. The Howse Pass holds the potential to meet many key points defined in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, we will build transportation systems that unite our communities and commerce, culture, and tourism. As we seek to achieve the competitive goals of our province, it is important to bring the construction of the Howse Pass into serious consideration. This could be a great asset not only to my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka but to all of central Alberta.

It is time, and I’m asking our government to collaborate with the government of British Columbia and the federal government to develop the final link, or the last spike, in a 21st century transportation strategy.

In closing, I would like again to thank the Lieutenant Governor for presenting the Speech from the Throne. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The comments on the Howse Pass brought back fond memories. In the 1960s I was on a committee, chaired by Marwood Swain from the hon. member’s constituency, that was promoting the construction of the Howse Pass at that time. It was my understanding that the whole issue had died, so I’m very pleased to hear that there’s some interest. My question is: is there an active movement in the member’s constituency to actually revive this plan to construct a highway across the Howse Pass?

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question, hon. member. I’m not aware at the moment of any really active movement to promote it, but I do know that over the past several years – and I mentioned the report that was done by

Schollie and associates from Red Deer. I think it was Schollie. This report was done in 2005, and it actually outlined the economic and social benefits of the Howse Pass project. The study was done in 2005, tabled with the government. There was some opposition from environmentalists and the federal government, that didn’t want to build any more roads in national parks. The fact is that the entire Icefields Parkway from Jasper to Lake Louise is a big highway right down the middle of a national park, and it is strictly for tourists. There is no commercial traffic on that road. What we need is a road that goes from central Alberta straight across to British Columbia using the David Thompson highway as the first link and then the Howse Pass as a very short link into B.C. It will cut off, you know, many, many miles from central Alberta.

I think for people from Calgary it won’t make much difference. For people from Edmonton it won’t make much difference. But in central Alberta probably half a million people are kind of land locked behind the mountains, away from their markets and their shortest route into British Columbia. So there is a movement out there. I know that Clearwater county and Rocky Mountain House and Lacombe county and probably Red Deer county and now even the town of Golden, B.C., are onside. I think in the future they will continue to work collaboratively to address this issue with their respective governments. We need the federal government to come onside first, and then the provincial governments can move forward.

The question about funding for the Howse Pass is a big issue as well. It will probably be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, but it is no different than what B.C. did with the Coquihalla highway years ago to shorten the route around the Fraser Canyon. They turned it into a toll road, and it actually paid for itself. People were happy to pay a few bucks to take the shortcut on a new road. The tolls are gone from the Coquihalla highway now if you go down there. The road is paid for, the public owns it, and it’s a wonderful short route through B.C. My opinion would be that this could be a toll road. The cost to the taxpayer is nothing except for the users.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I’m wondering if the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka can indicate: is there any chance, if the Howse Pass road was built, that another road could be closed? My concern, of course, is with habitat destruction, and that’s very rare and special habitat through there. If a new road was opened through the Howse Pass, is it possible to, say, restrict traffic or even close highways somewhere else in Banff?

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, again, for that question. I think that is a good question as well. The answer would probably be absolutely not. Right now highway 1 from, say, Banff to Golden is one of the most dangerous highways in all of Canada. A few years ago the fatality rate on that highway was five times the average of Alberta highway fatalities. That’s the stretch through the Kicking Horse Pass. The federal government and the B.C. government have put a lot of money into improving that stretch of highway. I don’t know if you’ve been through there lately, but just beyond Field, on the way to Golden, there’s a brand new bridge through there down the Kicking Horse Pass. They’ve spent close to a billion dollars on that section of road between Banff and Golden. It’s not quite a billion dollars at this point, but I think later projects, that came in after this study, probably total a billion dollars.

What we want to do is decant some of the traffic away from that road, take the busyness off that road, and put them on a new highway through the Howse Pass. It would divert some of the traffic. Both the Kicking Horse Pass and the Yellowhead Pass from



time to time close because of avalanches, mudslides, accidents, and whatever. When that happens, there's a total blockage, and the Howse Pass would be an alternate route to suffice for that problem.

**The Acting Speaker:** Do any other members wish to speak?  
Are you ready for the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion carried]

### Government Motions

#### Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

11. Mr. Hancock moved on behalf of Mr. Stelmach:  
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

**The Acting Speaker:** This is a debatable motion. Do any members wish to speak?  
Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[Government Motion 11 carried]

### 4:20 Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

#### Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

[Adjourned debate February 16: Mr. Hancock]

**Mr. Hancock:** I need to take an opportunity to address Bill 1, albeit hopefully briefly. I think Bill 1 is a very important piece of legislation. Legislation in this House can have several purposes, and in fact I think Bill 1 has several purposes. The first purpose of any legislation, I would suggest, is to provide a sense of direction. In some cases it can be almost poetry; it can be symbolic. Basically, one of the things that I think needs to be symbolized in Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, is that Alberta needs to be positioned in the world as a very competitive place to do business.

I was mentioning only this afternoon in the response to the Speech from the Throne how important it is for us to be well educated as Albertans. We're in a northern climate. We're a fair distance away from significant population nodes in the world. If we want to compete in the world, if we want to be citizens of the world, we need to have a good education. If we want to have opportunity for our children in Alberta, we need to be competitive.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It's very important that we send a message to Albertans and to the world that Alberta is a competitive place. It's a good place to live, it's got equality of life, it's got a strong education system, and it's a place where government does not get in the way of people doing business, does not get in the way of people in their ordinary lives yet has the appropriate regulations to ensure that we protect our environment, the appropriate level of protection in terms of workplace safety, in terms, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose said earlier, that our buildings are safe, and those sorts of things.

That's always one of the most difficult tasks, I think, for a government. Whenever anything goes wrong in the world, somebody will say: there ought to be a law. And we get burdened by

adding more and more laws to our lives. We were talking in an earlier debate in an earlier session about government and what government's role is, and there may be philosophical differences of viewpoints even in this House about the role of government. One of the things that I've always maintained is that government should not get in the way. Government should do the appropriate things that are necessary for a society to live together in peace and harmony, but it shouldn't go above and beyond it. It shouldn't be restricting individuals' ability to have and run their lives in their own interests, in what they believe to be important for themselves and their families.

Yet we do need government, and we do need some rules and regulations. We need criminal law, for example, because some people do not abide by the norms of society. We need codes in some cases, but we have to be careful that we're not telling people how to live their lives over and above what is necessary for a civil society. So there's a balance that is a very difficult one to achieve because, obviously, people do want to ensure that bad things don't happen; for example, every time there's a school bus accident in the province. There have been school bus accidents in the province, and they shouldn't happen, but when you take a look at those situations, people say: well, there ought to be a law. We look to see what more we could do to ensure that that situation doesn't happen again.

Oftentimes the things we ought to do are to go back and say: what responsibilities do we have as individuals to act in a cautious manner, to act in a prudent manner? You know, we shouldn't have to have a rule that says the bus driver has to go to the back of the bus to make sure that all the kids got off. We shouldn't have to have a rule that says you shouldn't run a bus if the back wheels are rusty and will fall off. You shouldn't have to have those rules. So there is that balance. We want to make sure that our children are protected. We want to make sure that our buildings are built right. We want to make sure that our environment is protected. Albertans, generally speaking, I think, are people who are environmentalists. We value the big blue sky and the clean water and the clean air. We value that, so we want to have environmental regulation.

What we need to have is a balance that says that while we understand the need for appropriate regulatory frameworks, we need to also have appropriate processes to make sure that those regulative frameworks are operated appropriately so that they're not getting in the way of people living their lives and doing business but are ensuring that business is done appropriately and lives are lived appropriately. That is a very interesting balance.

I think Bill 1 is important because it gives us, again, the framework to look at what we're doing as a government, to say that during the boom years in the province, when there have been lots of things happening, people have looked around and said, "This has gone wrong; there ought to be a law," and then a new law is created. In terms of codification perhaps things don't need to be codified if you can have a good policy framework in place. We need to look at that and make sure that we're not overburdening our society with rules but that we have the appropriate rules so that we can have the kind of society we want.

So I think Bill 1 is a very symbolic bill from that perspective because it really in the preamble sets that stage, but it also then goes on to provide for a mechanism by which we can examine our rules and say: "In what areas have we gone overboard with the rules? Let's get rid of those."

It's not simply a numeric thing. Some people say that, well, B.C. or some other jurisdiction has said: we're going to cut back on the rules by 35 per cent. If you look at some of the places where they've done that, it's actually sort of an arbitrary and not useful process to go through because often what they've done is, yes, reduced a number of regulations but not necessarily the thickness. They just

consolidate three regulations into one regulation and call it a day, and that doesn't help anybody. What we really need to do is to look and say, "Does the regulation provide a useful purpose? Is it there for a good reason? Is that reason still necessary? Are we doing something that we don't need to do?" If we're doing something we don't need to do, we should get rid of it.

I think it's very important for us to have a framework to constantly be able to assess the burden of law that we put on society. That's not to say that law is unnecessary; law is necessary. But there is a time and a place when law becomes a burden, and we should be careful of that.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make those few comments about the Alberta Competitiveness Act itself as both a symbolic act and a useful act but also, then, to take it one step further and comment about how that might be interpreted in other areas. For example, in the area of education we need to do, as government has indicated it will do and shall do, a value review to look at everything we're doing, because it's not just in the area of a regulatory reform and regulatory burden. It's not just in the area of whether it's competitive to do business in the province that we need to ensure that our resources are used to the most value for Albertans.

Last fall, for example, we had an opportunity to speak with school boards across the province, to ask them to work with us to identify the things that we're doing that don't add value. Are we asking for reports in areas that those reports don't actually accomplish much? If so, then we should stop asking for those reports. If we think those reports have value, we should be able to justify the value that we get from them. We need to look at everything that we're doing. We need to ask school boards to co-operate regionally to make sure that the resources we have afforded education go to helping to achieve the outcomes that we need in education, that every child has the opportunity to maximize their personal potential.

If we can do that, then the fact that we are in a fiscal restraint or the fact that we are in a period of time when we have a fiscal surplus, either of those can be weathered appropriately. When we are in a time of fiscal restraint, we can ensure that resources go to get the most value for Albertans' dollars, and when we're in a time of fiscal surplus, we can save that surplus for the benefit of future Albertans. Those, I think, are laudable objectives.

4:30

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that the Alberta Competitiveness Act is important both for what it actually says and what it actually does and for the message that it should send to all of us in government: to talk to the people we work with in our communities to find out where we're actually putting more of a burden than necessary, more regulation than necessary, more requirement with respect to paperwork and bureaucracy than necessary to accomplish the laudable goals of having a safe, civil society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Dr. Taft:** Yes. I listened to the minister's comments with some interest and will agree and will disagree on some of them. I am puzzled by the fate of what I think the former Premier used to call the stupid rules committee or something to that effect, the committee that was struck – and I think it was chaired by the Member for Foothills-Rocky View – which was supposed to cut red tape and do away with unnecessary rules and follow the example of the B.C. government and so on. It just seemed to disappear, so you'll have to excuse me, but I greet this bill with some skepticism, and you'll hear more about that when I have a chance to talk about it at length.

Why should a member have any more confidence in this bill? Given what happened to that stupid rules committee, it's just that there's an inconsistency. I mean, there's talk here, but historically there's been no action. Frankly, I'm not sure why I should think there would be action now. Maybe the minister can speak to that.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very important question, and I think it deserves a response. The response would be that there is no single point in time when you can say that the job is done. In fact, the dumb rules committee did some good work in its time. In fact, we have a Regulatory Review Secretariat that's chaired by one of our members, which reviews every new regulation coming forward to determine whether it's necessary and appropriate. There are processes in place to deal with regulation. In fact, before my time in this House, I served as a private-sector member on a review committee which actually had the effect of cutting back regulation.

But in government, regardless of what government you're in, whether you're a socialist government or a conservative government, regulations tend to grow, and laws tend to grow. I mean, members of the opposition have in the past wondered whether we would have more legislation. The very fact that we sit all the time suggests that we should be bringing legislation to the House because, after all, that's mainly what we do after passing a budget.

So legislation will grow, regulation will creep, and there's always a necessity to pick a point and say: we're going to have a new and renewed effort. Some of those times it has to be done with more vigour. This is one of those times, and that's why the Alberta Competitiveness Act, I think, is so important right now. We're in recessionary times. We want Alberta to be well positioned to lead not only Canada but the world out of that recession. If we're going to do that, we have to look at the overlap and duplication in so many of our processes and regulations.

It's not that the previous activities didn't work; they did. They had efficacy. They removed regulation; they've stopped regulations from coming in. But there is always an incessant pressure to grow the regulatory burden. We need at this time more than any other time to really focus on what the appropriate processes of government should be, the appropriate value we should be getting, and how we should intercede when necessary but not always necessarily intercede in the lives of Albertans.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Speaking of competitiveness, again to the hon. member. In terms of business research and development Alberta's performance has been dismal. Spending in research and development by Alberta businesses as a share of GDP ranks last among the four largest provinces, sits well below the national average, and has stayed relatively flat over time. What would the hon. minister like to see done or achieved through this competitiveness review to reverse this trend?

Thank you.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an interesting question, so let's just speculate on that. At one point in time I think there were seven different ethics committees that were necessary if somebody wanted to do medical research, seven different ethics committees that you might have to go to. If you wanted to do trials, for example, you'd have to go to the university. If presumably you were starting at the University of Alberta, you'd go to their ethics committee. Then you'd have to go to the Capital health ethics committee. Then if your patient population that was involved in this test or study was in other geographic areas, you might have to go to eight ethics committees across the province to

be able to deal there. If you had another educational institution involved, there might yet be another ethics committee. All of them are doing exactly the same thing. So why would you have eight or nine ethics committees in the way of getting your research done when one would do the trick?

**The Deputy Speaker:** To speak on the bill, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first congratulate Ashleigh McIvor and her family. Just a few minutes ago she won a gold medal in skiing for Canada. [applause] I will say that that's now six gold medals. That's one behind the lead, so we're doing well. We're doing well.

Now, on a not so positive note I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. There's no doubt we need to be more competitive, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Education clearly pointed out and spoke to. There is no doubt about that. It is good to see that this Premier and his government are finally willing to pay, at the very least, lip service to this important fact. I'm glad to see a growing Wildrose Alliance movement has had the intended effect, I hope.

During the 1990s Alberta established itself as one of the best places, Mr. Speaker, in the world to do business. We limited government spending growth. We paid off debt. We lowered taxes and provided tax incentives to attract new businesses and industries to our great province. The people of our province proudly referred to this as the Alberta advantage. Although Alberta still possesses some of these same features, our edge has slipped dramatically over the last decade.

Our tax advantage, for example, both in regard to personal and business income taxes has decreased dramatically as well. For example, B.C. now has lower income taxes for any person making under \$118,000. That's the vast majority of the population. For any person who makes under \$118,000 – that would be nurses, home-care workers, teachers, police officers, welders, construction workers, or janitors – it now makes more sense from a personal income tax perspective to live in B.C. That's definitely not what we want to be the case, I would argue.

We haven't lowered business taxes for years, and many provinces are quickly catching up to us, with plans to surpass us soon. If we allow them to, Albertans will lose jobs to other jurisdictions – it's as simple as that – and we will lose Albertans to other jurisdictions, which we certainly do not want.

Energy, Mr. Speaker, as everyone in this House knows, is our most important industry currently and pays for the health, education, and other programs Albertans and their families rely on. Because of this government's actions tens of billions of dollars in energy investment and the tens of thousands of jobs created therefrom have fled to neighbouring provinces due in large part to the new royalty framework, which I believe was one of the most misguided, mishandled policy debacles in all of Alberta's history. This has made us less competitive.

Then there is the danger on the horizon that we can see. Provincial government spending has been growing out of control for some time. Over the past several years we have spent far more per capita than any other province in Canada. Government spending has increased at more than double the rate of inflation plus population growth. By refusing to control spending to sustainable yearly increases, the provincial government now finds itself in the position of both taking on massive amounts of debt, a planned \$6 billion by 2012, while facing the prospect of cutting the promised programs that Albertans have come to rely on.

In my view, Mr. Speaker, piling up debt on the backs of future generations to dull the pain of a self-inflicted spending hangover is the height of irresponsibility. So, too, is expanding the size of government entitlement programs to the point where the only way to adequately fund those programs is to raise taxes or increase debt for future generations. It is my view that if we continue on our present course, we will leave ourselves and our children with an Alberta disadvantage. As nonrenewable resource revenues decrease, taxes increase; health, education, and other important social services are cut; and opportunities disappear.

4:40

Finally, the issue of overregulation and red tape, which the Minister of Education spoke to earlier. The regulatory burden on Alberta businesses, our engine of job creation, is astounding. Several independent assessments rank Alberta dead last nationally in this area. It is, in very fact, the Alberta disadvantage. It costs business billions of dollars in compliance costs, delays billions in investment, and costs thousands of jobs and millions of hours of opportunity costs. This government has done nothing to address this issue to this point.

I could go on about the current government's abysmal record with regard to helping our province be more competitive, but I will not. I will not. Bill 1, in my view, could be – and I emphasize could be – a first small step in the right direction. If this is simply lip service or a tool for appointing new do-nothing committees or agencies, then this bill will be a failure. If, however, this bill is used to mimic what has been done by other jurisdictions to become more competitive, then it is worth the support of this House, in my view.

The Wildrose is always looking for pioneers in our own province and in other jurisdictions who have found innovative ways to improve their economy and social programs. We like solutions to problems that mimic them, if appropriate, in the Alberta context. I will focus on one example today, that of our good neighbour to the west, British Columbia.

In 2001 the newly elected right-of-centre party – most would call them conservative although they do go by a different name, to be sure – promised to reduce regulation by one-third, or 33 per cent. It sounded to me, when I first heard that, like a typical promise, a big promise short on detail, but it turned out not to be. Through deregulation and regulatory reform efforts they exceeded that target, and to date they have reduced regulatory requirements in British Columbia by 42 per cent from 2001, a truly remarkable figure.

How did they do it? First, they identified a minister responsible for regulatory reform. The minister championed the initiative and reported to colleagues and to the public on the government's progress. Second, they established a regulatory reform office responsible for leading the initiative. They call it Straightforward B.C., and that organization was put within the ministry of the minister in charge of this initiative.

Third, they established a baseline measure. This is so important. I very much appreciated the remarks of the Education minister on this, but where I do disagree with him is this idea that if we do not track our progress numerically, we can still have the intended effect. There's no doubt you could have some effect doing that. I feel that you need to track those. You need to have measurable goals and objectives, or it just does not happen. It's just a fact of life, I think, in government especially.

They established a baseline measure by counting all regulatory requirements contained in provincial legislation and accompanying regulations and policies. This central database established a starting point so that they could monitor their progress. Just for the record, they started with a stunning 384,000 identified regulations in the province of British Columbia.

Their new office, Straightforward B.C., then reviewed existing legislation by developing and implementing three-year plans that laid out when each ministry would be reviewing existing regulations. Priority was given to regulations that affected economic competitiveness.

Next, they made an effort to control new regulation by creating a regulatory reform policy that set out criteria that must be used to develop and assess new regulations. Ministers must certify that proposed legislation and regulations have been developed using the criteria and provide rationale for any deviations.

Finally, and very importantly, the ministries set real and tangible targets and reported on performance. Targets were set out in the annual three-year business plans, as mentioned, for each ministry. The minister responsible for the initiative reported monthly to cabinet on the government's progress, and quarterly progress reports were published publicly. To date there's been a 42 per cent reduction in the regulatory burden, so roughly 239,000 regulations now exist in B.C. compared to the aforementioned 384,000 when they started.

Mr. Speaker, it is my view that this government, the current government in Alberta, has done a very poor job of making us competitive since the current Premier took office. They have some successes before that, but it has been a disaster since. It's never too late to do the right thing. I will be supporting this bill with the caveat that this had better be more than just lip service. We have a good example to follow in B.C. on reducing red tape, so let's do it. The Wildrose has been offering solutions to make us more competitive in the energy sector as well as offering ideas to maintain the Alberta advantage through better fiscal management and savings, so let's do it. In short, it's time to stop talking about being competitive and start being competitive.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of 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 Airdrie-Chestermere for his comments. One thing he and I do share in common is a concern about the tax burden on working families in this province.

He mentioned a comparison to B.C. One thing that he did not mention is that B.C. currently has a 7 per cent sales tax and on July 1, 2010, will move to a 12 per cent harmonized tax with the federal government. I would like to ask this member if he supports the introduction of a sales tax in Alberta.

**Mr. Anderson:** Well, it's a bit of a stretch, but I'll do my best. First of all, the harmonized tax didn't increase their tax burden. As you know, that's just a harmonization of the GST with the provincial sales tax. I mean, I don't know where that's coming from. You know, for a lot of people income tax takes more of our money away than sales tax because sales tax, as you know, hon. member, often gets worked into the prices, whether you have it or not. It's just that corporations will generally know where the supply-demand curves are, and they'll account for the GST, so essentially you're going to get a lot of times, not all of the time, generally the same pricing.

I don't think that really has anything to do with my comments on personal income tax. That fact is that everyone under \$118,000 in income in B.C. pays more tax than they do here. That's almost 90 per cent of the population of Alberta. So we're not that competitive. We think we're competitive. We think we've got a great Alberta advantage, and we do still have some, there's no doubt, but if we do

not start seriously working on this, the Alberta advantage that you and I grew up with in our younger years, now that we're old men, we might not be able to pass that on to our kids, especially with the incredible overspending that we are currently doing in this province. It's very important that we get that under control, that we put a plan in place where we can actually start lowering taxes to remain competitive.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened to the member's comments with interest. He raised an issue which he'll need to explain to me. I've thought about this with his party's platform for some time. It looks to me like his party's position is that the Alberta government should cut taxes, it should maintain programs, it should reduce royalties, and at the same time it should avoid debt. That seems to me an impossibility. My question to the member from Airdrie-Chestermere, because he more or less spoke directly to that issue in his comments, is: how are you going to do that?

**Mr. Anderson:** It's actually just basic economic theory. We're going to build the pie. We're going to create more wealth in our country and in our province. That means that the same amount of people will actually pay more in tax revenues but not on a per-person basis. I think this is basic conservative economic theory, and I espouse it.

The other thing that we need to do – and this is something I know you agree with because I've heard you talk about it a hundred times – is we need to grow the Alberta heritage fund. We need to continue to grow it to the point where the interest from that fund every year replaces our reliance on oil and natural gas revenues and thereby eventually allows us to slowly lower income taxes, replace the need for income taxes with a mountain of investment capital that is providing interest each and every year. That is how I think we can, outside of just simply growing the economic pie through lower taxation, attracting new businesses, et cetera, to the province. Those are kind of the two main ways I see that we can accomplish all those great things. We can have our cake and eat it too. It's the great thing about being a Conservative.

4:50

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a comment for the follow-up question. First off, the member had mentioned about the PST in B.C. Actually, it becomes a much broader tax when you put it with the GST as opposed to the narrower tax. That notwithstanding, I don't think I heard an exact answer. Would this member like to see an introduction of a sales tax in Alberta under any circumstances?

**Mr. Anderson:** Well, you know, I think it's pretty clear that should any type of sales tax be implemented or be proposed, we have clear legislation . . .

**An Hon. Member:** We?

**Mr. Anderson:** Sorry. The government has clear legislation that states that that would have to go to a referendum vote, and I support that concept.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I have a list here of speakers sent to me recently. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join second reading debate on Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. This act will essentially create a body charged with assessing the progress of initiatives aimed at improving Alberta's international competitiveness. Moreover, this body will also be charged with creating recommendations to further enhance government, business, and industry programs designed to improve competitiveness. In simple terms, this means that Bill 1 will create a mechanism to ensure that Alberta remains the best place in North America to invest.

Now, for many this might mean a review of our royalty structure and energy industry. After all, Alberta is Canada's energy powerhouse, and this industry, perhaps more than any other, dramatically impacts our provincial revenue and our overall economy. This is a reality that is well known in my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat. In fact, around 60 per cent of Alberta's total energy revenues have come from the bountiful natural gas reserves in and around my constituency.

It is clear that Alberta needs to be competitive in this area. However, I would argue that competitiveness goes beyond energy, investment, and development. Rather, it's important to ensure that Alberta remains competitive in all areas of the economy, be they energy, agriculture, or tourism. In my mind, Bill 1 will allow us to remain competitive from a trade perspective. In fact, I would argue that the benefits to trade competitiveness are perhaps the greatest strength of this legislation.

Nowhere does this become more apparent than by looking at agriculture, specifically the ag food industry. One of the most dramatic events affecting this sector of the economy is the slow closing or constriction of our largest market, the United States. We can all remember the situation that arose with BSE a couple of years back, and we can all remember the havoc that it caused our ranchers and their families. Simply put, Alberta's agricultural sector has increasingly made itself dependent on one market, and if this market closes or contracts, it could negatively impact this sector. In fact, just days ago the President of the United States announced that Canada will no longer be on the restricted list of countries affected by the buy American incentive protectionism. Mr. Speaker, this is good news. This is a change.

What we need, Mr. Speaker, is to look for additional markets to replace the United States but to complement and diversify, and increasingly this means eastern Asia and other parts of the world. However, when we look to expand our trade beyond the United States, it quickly becomes obvious that we're not competing alone. Rather, jurisdictions like Australia and Argentina are actively competing with us for access to Asian markets. This, of course, leads us back to the issue of competitiveness.

Mr. Speaker, all markets and all consumers look for two things, price and quality. Now, with Alberta placed in a position where it is competing with mass-producing jurisdictions like Australia and Argentina, it becomes difficult for us to compete from a price perspective. This means there is a large quantity of goods on the market, which in turn drives prices down.

However, Alberta can compete on the quality side of the equation with quality grain like durum and barley. We have quality Alberta beef. From a competitive perspective this means that initiatives need to be expanded that further develop the high quality of Alberta's agricultural goods. Initiatives like livestock age verification and meat packaging and processing can dramatically enhance the quality of Alberta's agricultural products. Initiatives like getting rid of the monopoly marketing structure for grains and an increase in quality can mean an increase in price.

Mr. Speaker, a second area of international competitiveness I would like to explore is the idea of expanding our name recognition. After all, Albertans already know about the quality of our agricultural sector, they already know about the strength of our energy industry, and they already know about the potential of our people. What is important from a competitive perspective is that the rest of the world knows. The world needs to know that Alberta is the provider of safe, secure, and convenient energy. They need to know that Alberta has a world-class agricultural sector committed to safety and quality, and they need to know that Alberta is committed to free trade and industrial development. Essentially, in order to be competitive, I believe Alberta needs to expand, develop, and strengthen its international name recognition. People in foreign countries need to instantly associate Alberta with quality and sound business sense.

In addition, people around the world should also be able to instantly recognize Alberta as a beacon of world-class tourism. After all, our national parks are already the envy of the world. Instantly Banff, Jasper, and Waterton come to mind. While I support measures to promote our already world-class tourist destinations, I feel that from a competitiveness standpoint we should focus on some of our more hidden treasures, treasures like the Milk River badlands, where they are currently excavating dinosaur fossils for the Royal Tyrrell Museum; Writing-on-Stone provincial park, where there's one of the greatest concentrations of rock art in North America; and Medalta Pottery, which historically made 75 per cent of this country's pottery at the turn of the century.

These treasures, which are in and near my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat, are truly spectacular and could stand to benefit greatly from the international limelight. Mr. Speaker, there are treasures all over this province. I believe that promoting these treasures like this should be one of the key priorities of the competitiveness body created by this act.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I believe that in order to be competitive on the world stage, we need to recognize and encourage our export-based businesses, businesses like Meggitt industries in my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat. Last weekend here in Edmonton Meggitt industries won the prestigious exporter of the year award from the Alberta Chamber of Commerce. This award recognizes an organization that has achieved outstanding success in exporting their products outside of Canada's borders. In the case of Meggitt industries these products are primarily unmanned vehicle systems. These systems are very interesting pieces of technology that can have many practical uses, both in the military, by police forces, and commercially as well.

Also, that is why the Canadian Centre for Unmanned Vehicle Systems is located in Medicine Hat. The unmanned vehicles made and exported by Meggitt industries include land, sea, and air vehicles. The land vehicles are used for search and rescue as well as towing military targets in live-fire exercises. The sea vehicles are Zodiac-type boats, which are used by countries to remotely patrol harbours and also anywhere that there are naval exercises. Their vehicles are drones, et cetera, that we hear so much about that are used in both military and civilian applications from surveillance in Afghanistan to patrols using radar and spectral imaging for such things as search and rescue and watching for forest fires. All these are controlled remotely and offer the military the opportunity to create a realistic training scenario, and they offer civilian applications to carry out their work while keeping people out of harm's way.

Mr. Speaker, because of the success of this company and its technology its products are in high demand all over the world, including the United States, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom,

and South Africa, to mention a few. This is truly a great success story for this industry, my constituency, and indeed Alberta as a whole. After all, Alberta is an exporting jurisdiction that transports billions of dollars of energy products every year, and for a technology industry to win exporter of the year truly highlights the value and potential of Alberta's technology. After all, this is just one example of how Alberta's technology is leading the world.

5:00

In closing, I'd like to thank the government for its sound decision-making, exemplified by its commitment to overall competitiveness, competitiveness that stretches beyond the energy industry and royalties to examine where Alberta stands on the international stage and where we need to go to remain an in-demand jurisdiction. To this end, I believe that initiatives like adding value to our agricultural products, developing our international name recognition, and recognizing our export businesses will go a long way towards telling the world who we are and what we're capable of. Albertans already know this, but it's our job to make sure that the rest of the world knows. I will offer my full support to Bill 1, and I encourage all members of the House to join me.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question to the hon. member, speaking of value-added initiatives. While synthetic crude oil production has increased, an enormous amount of bitumen continues to be shipped by pipeline out of this province. Indeed, the share of synthetic crude oil and bitumen production remaining in Alberta for refining and transport fuels has fallen, from 34 per cent a decade ago to 23 per cent in 2007, the latest statistics that I have. Would the hon. member think it is to our competitive advantage to ensure that there is a significant increase in the upgrading of bitumen here in this province?

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

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that question. Yes, I do. I believe that there's an advantage to increasing our upgrading, and I believe that the fact that there are upgraders standing in the wings ready to be built, as far as I know, in this province speaks to that point. When you talk about the 1.3 million barrels of oil being produced by the oil sands ramping up to 5 million barrels per day perhaps by 2015, my question is: how many upgraders is that going to take to be able to handle that amount of capacity? The reason I ask that question is: how much can each upgrader do? If we're talking 1.3 million barrels per day, and we need, according to the quotes that you mentioned, perhaps a couple more upgraders to handle those – and I don't know the capacity of each upgrader – when that increases by two- or threefold, does that mean, then, that we should have two or three times as many upgraders built in Alberta to be able to take that? Is that actually realistic?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same member. I appreciate that response. However, as the next export pipeline is commissioned and comes on stream, it is to my knowledge going to provide at least 600,000 barrels a day of extra export capacity, all going south. As this production of bitumen increases – and I hope the hon. member is right, that it increases significantly; I don't know if it will reach the 5 million barrels a day mark in such

a short period of time – do you think we should take our export eggs, put them in separate baskets and that the next pipeline that is to be built from this province, whether it's for upgraded bitumen or bitumen products, should be to tidewater in either Kitimat or Prince George so that we can serve the east Asian market?

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. One of the things to remember as well is that the Alberta government is not building the pipelines. It is the companies themselves that are doing this. This is all industry. The hon. member has mentioned something about perhaps looking at moving to the tidewater, whether it's to Kitimat or whether it's to someplace on the west coast. Certainly, that's possible. I think that if the thing is warranted by the companies, they will consider that.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Does the hon. member not agree that it's in the public interest in this province to ensure that we diversify our export markets not only to the lower 48 states for our petroleum and petroleum products but also to the Asian markets, which are expanding much more quickly than the American market?

**Mr. Mitzel:** I think this goes back to the point I mentioned about diversification. In my notes I talked about diversification and the fact that in order to be competitive, we should work with what we have in value-added. We should also consider diversification. I was speaking at the moment about agriculture and agrifood products, but the hon. member brings up energy. We are the powerhouse for energy in Canada, and certainly the opportunity to diversify is there as well.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I just want to read the list here again. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, the Member for Calgary-Hays, the Member for St. Albert.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure it'll come as a shock and a surprise that I have a very different reading of this legislation than the government or the member from the third party, now the Wildrose Alliance. I think this is one of the silliest bills I've ever seen. I read it carefully, I think about it, and it just strikes me as silly, wasteful, empty, pointless, and misguided. I'm not sure what else I can say to make my position clear.

**Mr. MacDonald:** You've convinced me.

**Dr. Taft:** Okay. I've convinced one person already.

I have trouble right from the beginning with this bill. Obviously, being economically competitive is important and so on, but underlying this bill, if we ask ourselves as legislators what's beneath the surface here, beneath the surface is essentially a view of a society as an economy. I think a society is much more than an economy. I think that we would be better off to have bills that address not competitiveness but all kinds of other things: productivity or social justice or equality or co-operation.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

One of the issues that I think we need to acknowledge and debate in this Assembly as this bill works its way through is: what does competition mean? Inevitably with competition there are winners

and losers. So you might want to just change this and call this the Alberta winners and losers act. If we understand Alberta as being fundamentally driven by competitiveness, then we're also, really, re-enacting what, for example, we've watched in the Olympics right now, which is a handful of winners and a huge number of very worthy competitors who lost. If we build our society on that principle, then we're going to end up with a society where there's a handful of winners and a huge number of very worthy people who are the losers. I think we need to think through that approach to a society.

I also wonder even: how is competitiveness defined here? One of my great frustrations with this government's business plans and so much of its legislation is that they're so vaguely presented that you don't actually know what they mean. How would you know if it succeeded? How would you know if something happened? In this case, how would we know if we were more competitive? How is competitiveness reflected in our society? Does it mean that the rich get richer? Does it mean that we have a better education system? Does it mean that we're closing the gap between the impoverished and the middle class, that we're enriching the middle class, that we're more culturally advanced? What does it mean? There's no clear sense of that in this piece of legislation.

5:10

Of course, then, without that you could say: well, how is it measured? Well, you can't measure it if we don't define it. I mean, if we were to look at, say, the activities of Goldman Sachs – they were devoted to competitiveness – or Bear Stearns or some of those other merchant banks on Wall Street, that was all about competitiveness, wasn't it? If there was one lesson in the last couple of years in the global economy, it's that unfettered competitiveness is destructive. In fact, one of the great lessons for the conservative movement of the last couple of years – and it's a lesson apparently lost on some – is that unfettered competitiveness is a bad idea. Committing yourself to nothing more than competitiveness sets you up for disaster. So I hope we hear some discussion about that from the government on this bill.

Are we talking here about long-term competitiveness or short-term competitiveness? Once you unleash competitiveness, inevitably the time frame gets tighter and tighter and tighter, and decisions are made to become competitive in the next few years and then in the next year and then in the next few months until we're really scrambling on this treadmill that's getting us nowhere but down. It does become, as so many people have observed, a race to the bottom. So I don't see what's in this piece of legislation to help us avoid a race to the bottom.

Does this mean more tax cuts until we have the lowest tax regime in the developed world? Then why stop there? That's not as competitive as, you know, China might be or India. Does it mean reduced environmental rules? Does it mean other adjustments like that that become lower labour standards? You know, one of the reasons I'm told in this Assembly over and over that farm workers have no coverage under WCB or occupational health and safety or the labour code is: well, we'd be uncompetitive. Well, if that holds for agriculture workers, then pretty soon it's going to hold for other workers, industrial workers and others. So this kind of blind commitment to competitiveness, I think, is ignorant. It's short sighted, it's misguided, and it'll be destructive.

What is the point of competitiveness, Mr. Speaker? Has this government asked itself: why do we want to be more competitive? Is it because we want to be wealthier? Is it because we want to be culturally richer? Is it because we want to have healthier people living longer lives? If those are the goals of being competitive, then

why don't we have acts that talk about that? Why are we so focused on competitiveness?

Now, the Minister of Education spoke of the preamble to Bill 1 as if it were poetry. That was his word, and I gagged. I object to the very first line of this preamble, which reads: "Whereas Alberta's success is founded on the competitiveness and the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans." Mr. Speaker, that's nothing short of distortion. That's a misrepresentation. I can tell you that Alberta's success is founded every bit as much on co-operativeness. Alberta's success is founded on people coming together in the late 1800s to form school boards so that they could all pay taxes so that their kids could get an education. They co-operated. Alberta's success is founded on religious organizations and municipalities bringing people together to build hospitals. It's founded on people coming together and co-operating as farmers to bring in all kinds of improvements to our agricultural system. It's based on programs like rural electrification. The rural electrification program, one of the most important advances in the history of Alberta, didn't happen because of competition. So this nonsense in the first sentence of the preamble here, that Alberta's success is founded on competitiveness, should be struck from this legislation.

Then it goes on, Mr. Speaker. The next phrase of this preamble goes like this: "Whereas competitiveness is core to the Government of Alberta's plan to position Alberta for sustained prosperity." It goes on. The fourth line of this preamble may be the most disturbing line in this legislation: "Whereas the Government of Alberta believes that the role of government is to create the conditions for competitiveness."

Mr. Speaker, it may be news to members of this Assembly, but the role of government is not to create conditions for competitiveness. The role of government, I would argue, is to steward this province's people and natural resources to build a better future. Sometimes that's through healthy competition, and a lot of the time it isn't. But if members of this governing party actually believe what this legislation says, that "the role of government is to create the conditions for competitiveness so that entrepreneurship, innovation and investment will generate benefits for Albertans," I think we're in worse trouble than I ever believed.

What about justice? What about cultural development? What about the role of government in making sure that every Albertan has a meal and that every Albertan has a roof over their head and that every Albertan has the right to vote in provincial elections? Now, those would be legitimate roles for government. Those could be considered as the role for government.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, even if we were to accept the notion that the role of government is to generate competitiveness, isn't it really the role of government to be a referee? If we accept that sometimes competition is good, then isn't it the role of government to make sure that it's healthy and fair competition? Isn't it the role of government, for example, to make sure that children born into impoverished families have a fair right to compete equally with children born into families where there's wealth and all kinds of opportunity? That used to be a role for government.

Mr. Speaker, I think what we've done in this piece of legislation is lost sight of what government really is about. I think that this reflects a government that's been captured by one ideology and one set of interests and has stopped taking the long-term welfare of our society into consideration. My esteemed colleague from Lethbridge-East, if I may quote her without even having consulted her, said something to me in the fall that really, really stuck with me. She said: you know, it took centuries to separate the church from the state, and now we have to separate the corporation from the state. I think truer words were never said.

We have here a piece of legislation that doesn't actually reflect the broad interests of the people of Alberta. This is a flagship bill that essentially says that the role of government is to create conditions so that corporations can flourish. Well, sure, that is a role of government, but it's certainly not the role of government, and it certainly is misguided to say that Alberta's success is founded on competitiveness.

5:20

Many people here probably don't realize it, but the roots of the New Democratic Party actually go back to the city of Calgary and very, very important political activity that happened in the city of Calgary in the 1930s that led to the foundation of the CCF, which eventually led to the rise of the New Democrats. It's true. I wish that some acknowledgement of those traditions was also in this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on beyond that, but I think my point is clear here. This is a piece of legislation that is misguided, and I'd like it to be struck from the Order Paper of this Assembly.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood under 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you. First, I'd like to compliment the hon. member for a great speech. I enjoyed it very much, and I agreed with all of it, which is not something I always can say about his speeches. In this particular case I thought he was absolutely dead on, Mr. Speaker.

I'd just like to ask the hon. member what he thinks the government needs to do in order to be competitive with other jurisdictions in the matter of education. I don't think he spoke at great length about that aspect.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the matter of education, I'm going to focus on postsecondary education if I may. My strong feeling is that not just for competitiveness but for the health of our democracy, for the health of our society we need to invest in stable, long-term, generous funding for postsecondary education as well as for K to 12, but I'm just choosing to focus on postsecondary education. Historically the concept of public education in this country – and it is a very, very proud history – is that it was the great equalizer, that we made sure that every child, no matter how privileged or underprivileged, had the right to an education. That started in grade 1 and then in kindergarten, and it went right through to postsecondary education, and many, many, Albertans and many, many Canadians have benefited from that.

One of the key roles of government is to make sure that that opportunity is sustained, and I would argue that an important way to do that is to stabilize the funding for postsecondary education so that tuition fees can actually be reduced. When I was a student way, way back, tuition fees were, I want to say, \$300, something like that, and it was unusual for students to have to work to support themselves while they went through university. I think there's been a real loss when we now see students who have to work 10, 20, 30 hours a week to put themselves through university.

One of the things I'd like to see government do is understand that a crucial role for them is to bring all members of this society along through a generous education program, starting at preschool and going right through to postgraduate. We're halfway there. We're maybe even more than halfway there, but we're slipping. Let's stop the slippage and reverse it.

I will also raise, if I may, one other key point here, which is that I think it is morally abhorrent that in this province we allow children to sit in classrooms hungry through no fault of their own and that this government refuses to take any direct action about that. I think that it is morally bankrupt of this government to do that. I tell you that if you wanted to win me over to competitiveness, then you could come forward and say: you know, we're going to make this a more competitive society by feeding our kids who are hungry through no fault of their own and giving them a chance. They're sitting in schools by the thousands, as young as six and seven and eight, wondering where their next meal is going to come from. That's wrong, and it's a black mark on this government that it won't take any direct action on it. Fix our competitiveness there.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

**Ms Redford:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I found the member's comments quite interesting. I do agree with him with respect to the definition of competitiveness and that one of the opportunities that we have in this province is to explore exactly what that means. I was a little surprised to see the balance between – and I don't mean this in a facetious way – how we decide how to invest in social programs and how we can afford to pay for those social programs. Now, I do believe that if you read the legislation as the hon. member quoted and you read it very specifically, I could see some of the arguments that the hon. member made, but I'd like him to think a little bit more about what the consequences might be with respect to that.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure today to stand in this Assembly and speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I am very pleased to expound on how this timely and important act can positively impact on my constituents in West Yellowhead. This important piece of legislation will examine ways to further enhance Alberta's competitive advantage.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is in an enviable position. We have an economic environment that promotes hard work, investment, risk taking, and entrepreneurship. More importantly, we have a government that facilitates and enhances this positive economic climate. I believe that through this act we will examine whether or not we are doing the best we can in accomplishing our objectives, and if not, we will act.

Mr. Speaker, one of this government's priorities is a competitive economic climate. A competitive economic climate is the result of many factors, including fiscal, trade, labour, and regulatory policies, just to name a few. Alberta currently has the most competitive fiscal policy of any province in Canada. It is one that values low taxes. After all, low tax rates are crucial to help small and large businesses and industries compete in the global economy. Our fiscal policy also enshrines sound fiscal management, which is exemplified by initiatives like the sustainability fund, a \$17 billion fund designed to help sustain our programs if there is a decline in revenue.

Mr. Speaker, we also made great strides to reduce barriers to trade, investment, and labour through the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, known as TILMA, which we have signed with British Columbia. Through TILMA there will be increased access for businesses, investors, and workers to the markets of both Alberta and British Columbia, which will enhance the competitiveness of both jurisdictions.



Mr. Speaker, in comparison to other jurisdictions we are well positioned to compete in the world marketplace. However, I'd like to focus on specific areas in the microlevels of government where we could possibly improve on our competitive advantage, especially in relation to the forest industry.

Mr. Speaker, the forest industry is very important to my constituency of West Yellowhead, and this government recognizes the important contribution of this industry to the overall Alberta economy. As such, this government has made efforts to limit the amount of unnecessary regulation while at the same time promoting innovative changes aimed at increasing the competitiveness of this industry.

However, Mr. Speaker, regulatory pressures, particularly in the various levels of government, continue to have a direct effect on the forest industry. Those in the industry tell me that it is often the constant changes in regulation that erode our competitiveness, and while this government has made an effort to limit the amount of regulatory change, we could perhaps go even further. For example, when the Auditor General audits an SRD operation, it tends to be followed by an overabundance of regulatory changes launched to address the issues identified by the Auditor General. This can result in layers of regulations that increase costs, staff workloads, and decrease competitiveness.

In addressing these types of challenges, I would suggest that it is crucial to involve the industry and take common-sense approaches that address the identified issues while minimizing the layers of regulation. One way of addressing this would be to increase forest industry advocacy in both the senior and junior levels of government. At first advocacy may not seem like a component that would improve competitiveness. However, a lack of advocacy can result in and have the effect of regulations being developed without proper consultations. This can of course adversely affect the competitiveness of this industry.

5:30

Another area where we could remove red tape is in the process for conducting historical resource surveys. Currently whenever an industry is proposing development, they are required to conduct historical resource surveys that are of great cost to industry. These surveys are important to ensure that heritage sites are protected. However, they are required of forestry, energy, recreation, and even government often on the same landscape. Perhaps this process could be streamlined to ensure that there is not a redundancy while at the same time save industry money.

A third area where we can improve our competitiveness is in the process of surveying new or amended licence of occupation roads, or LOCs. Currently the costs of conducting road surveys are a huge burden on the forest industry and all industries that are required to survey new roads. Mr. Speaker, GPS technology has gone a long way in the last few years. The same surveying objectives could be achieved by using advanced GPS technology that would be even more cost-effective for industry.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize that on the larger scale, the macro level, Alberta is well above other jurisdictions when it comes to competitiveness. That said, the competitiveness review provides the opportunity to examine the micro-operations of government, ensure that regulations are in place which are mutually beneficial. This will further enhance our competitiveness advantage and enable an even higher standard of living for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. Premier for introducing this important piece of legislation as I think it exemplifies his commitment to ensuring that Alberta remains the most competitive jurisdiction in North America.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. I wonder if I might ask the hon. member across: does he not consider that some of the thought processes behind this Bill 1 in terms of competitiveness could be interpreted as a direct interference in the business community?

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

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't see it as a direct interference with the business community at all. You know, the world has become a very small place. I think it's important that government and industry partner together to make sure that we are competitive in the global economy, so make sure that we have good regulations in place, make sure that we have safety for our workers, and make sure that we can compete in the global economy. If we continue to work and function within the microcosm, we're going to lose our advantage. I think that we're starting to see that as industries such as Russia's, China's, India's come on stream. With the innovation they have and the large population they have, we have to work together to make sure that we are there at the end of the day.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any others wish to speak on 29(2)(a)?

I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. It's always interesting when we start a new session to see what the government has selected for Bill 1. Sometimes there have been bills that have been selected which have a theme with which I can't disagree; I think children and poverty. There have been a number of them that had good intentions. Very rarely did they make a significant difference if you evaluate them. I think the same thing might be said of this one.

Competitiveness in and of itself is not a bad thing, considering the economic system in which we operate. It's something that's important, and it's the responsibility of governments to ensure that we are competitive. But to place it by itself without a reference to the other things that are important, I think, is showing that the government is far too single-minded with respect to the issue of economic or financial competitiveness.

I know that the hon. Minister of Justice has suggested in some of her questions that we need to take a broader view of this. But in my submission, Mr. Speaker, this bill is not written in a way that could lead a reasonable person to believe that a very broad measure of competitiveness is intended. I think that it's very clear that the act is focused very much on the economic competitiveness. In that sense it is one-sided, and it is focused on a number of things which are not new to this government in terms of competitiveness.

If I think back to the days when Ralph Klein was the Premier and he talked about the Alberta advantage, and you broke down the Alberta advantage and what many of the components of that were, they included things like lax environmental regulation, particularly in the vicinity of the oil sands. It meant that there weren't the same protections for workers in terms of health and safety, in terms of the enforcement. It meant that it was harder to organize unions, which is something that corporations like to see because they see that as part of the competitive environment. So this is not new to the government.

What is new, Mr. Speaker, is the rise of another political party in our province, which is, if you can believe it, even further to the right than the Progressive Conservative Party and the consternation and

political concern that has arisen on the part of this government that it may be losing the favour of some elements in the business sector and particularly in the oil industry as a result of its very, very watered down changes to royalties in our province.

Mr. Speaker, the first thing that I would do is to suggest that we rename the bill, Bill 1, from the Alberta Competitiveness Act to the Wildrose Alliance inoculation act, something that will protect this government from those in business and particularly in the oil and gas industry that have become disappointed, shall we say, in the Progressive Conservative Party and have begun to fund the Wildrose Alliance Party as a way of bringing political pressure on the Progressive Conservatives to return to the fold of true conservatism. What that means, of course, is very low royalties, very low taxes, very low regulations, very high thresholds, for example, for forming unions or for protecting the rights of workers in our society.

This direction, this race to the bottom, is, I think, of great concern to all Albertans. This competitiveness, as practised by this government, comes at the expense of worker health and safety. It comes at the expense of the very poor in our society. It comes at the expense of environmental degradation, and it impacts in a significant way the cultural development of the province. It impacts education, and it impacts our health care system.

Now, we're running a very large deficit, Mr. Speaker, in this budget. The government has provided additional funds for health care and some aspects of education. They've cut many other things in the budget because it's a political budget dealing with the political situation the government now finds itself in.

One of the aspects that it does not address is the whole question of the revenue side of this province. Now, this government has, since I've been involved in politics municipally and here, introduced the flat tax on personal incomes in the province. Of course, the biggest reductions in taxes under that come for the very wealthiest of Albertans. It's very, very heavily weighted in that direction.

Many middle-income Albertans actually are paying more taxes, yet the government is not addressing the competitiveness of their taxation system on personal incomes for middle-income Albertans, who are actually paying more taxes than they would have. They are focused instead on the competitiveness of the wealthiest Albertans. According to calculations that have recently been made public, the value of that in terms of lost revenue in this budget is \$5.5 billion, most of which goes to the very wealthiest individuals in our society. Mr. Speaker, that alone would cover the entire deficit of the province of Alberta in this budget.

5:40

Then there's the whole question of corporate taxes. At a time when corporations were earning massive profits and I think EnCana a few years ago earned a profit of I don't know if it was \$7 billion or \$9 billion of profit, this government has cut taxes on corporations by over a third in the last eight years. I was present when Steve West, who was then the Provincial Treasurer, announced the goal of cutting the rate for corporate taxes from 15 to 8 per cent. I think we're around 10 per cent now, Mr. Speaker, so the government's got a couple of points left to go, but that has also caused the government to give up several billion dollars of revenue in each budget year.

Now, these are policy decisions, Mr. Speaker. I assume that they have been taken in the pursuit of competitiveness, in pursuit of making Alberta a competitive place. But it has placed our province in deficit, and it's also made us extremely dependent on natural gas revenues, which is where we get the bulk of our royalty revenue.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're now in the difficult position that when the price of gas tanks, we have to lay off nurses. That's not a competitive government, in my view. It's a government that is spending its children's inheritance because it is unwilling to make those who can

afford to pay more and who benefit the most from our society pay their fair share. Of course, we also have some of the lowest royalties in the world when it comes to oil and particularly for tar sands oil. These are policy decisions that this government has made already to try and make us, quote, more competitive.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things that I think the government could do to actually make us more competitive – and I'm still using it in a fairly narrow sense economically – and that is to start making investments in renewable energy in a big way. If we go forward as a province, we will find that there comes a time when it's more and more difficult to sell our oil on the international market and where oil in particular is being displaced as a major source of energy in the world. Now, that may be difficult to accept today, but I think it's a reality.

The problem is that this government is doing nothing to position this province so that it can be the energy leader in Canada in the future in a posthydrocarbon, postcarbon economy. I think that if we want to be competitive, then we need to focus on that. Simply a race to the bottom with the lowest possible taxes is not going to be the answer. You need to be intelligent about it. You can't just say: "We're going to slash our taxes to the very bone. We're going to charge the lowest royalties in the world, and the free market will take care of us." You know, the history of the world is replete with jurisdictions that have adopted that approach and have ended up in poverty.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk a little bit about some of the language. I appreciated very much the comments from Edmonton-Riverview with respect to this bill and with respect to the one-sided and breathtaking assumptions contained in the preamble to the bill. "Whereas Alberta's success is founded on the competitiveness and the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans": that is a very questionable statement. For the government to quote it in the preamble to its Bill 1 is extremely presumptuous and downright, I think, inaccurate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview did talk about the co-operative spirit in Alberta, and I'd like to add to those remarks a little bit. Let's not forget the agricultural societies that were created in this province, the wheat pools. Let's not forget the gas co-operatives, which still operate; the rural electrification associations, which still operate. One of the things that gives me hope as a social democrat in Alberta is the co-operative traditions of this province, which are long and deep.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the United Farmers of Alberta represented much of that co-operative spirit among agricultural producers in the earlier years of our province. The United Farmers of Alberta government was, in fact, the same government that negotiated with Ottawa so that the natural resources in our soil belong to the province of Alberta and not to the federal government. Albertans owe that particular party and that movement a real debt of gratitude. The UFA still continues today but not as a political party. A large portion of that party, the UFA, was involved in the founding of the CCF in our province, which is, of course, the direct precursor to Alberta's NDP.

I think that if we look back on history, we'll find that the assumptions contained in this act are false and misrepresent Alberta's history, and I think they also are equally false in terms of a compass for moving the province forward. If we want to be more competitive, I think we need to make sure that we have a first-class health care system. That's one of the advantages Canada has relative to the United States in terms of the location of companies in our country.

A first-class education system is even more important to our competitiveness, so I think the government should be focusing on that, but there's not a mention of it in this act. A clean environment and good social conditions all go towards making Alberta more competitive, a more desirable place to invest and to live, and I think

that the one-sided nature of this bill is in fact going to be at cross-purposes with true competitiveness, that we would like to see in our province. We would like to see the oil and gas industry continue to prosper at the same time as they pay their fair share and at the same time as we prepare for the day when renewable energy replaces carbon and hydrocarbon fuels.

We would like to see a much better bill than this, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of questions for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I've always had some difficulty following the tax-the-rich economic theories that come from that part of the House. Just some clarification, because I've heard it twice, on how being competitive is somehow a race to the bottom. That would be one question, but I have a couple more if I may.

I'm just wondering how the member envisions us caring for our vulnerable and ensuring that we have good, well-paid jobs in this province and a safe work environment for all if we're not competitive and we don't attract national and international business investment to our province. That's one question.

The other question. When we spoke about investing in renewable energy, I'm just wondering how he envisions that replacing the hundred million dollars a day plus that flows into our province from our export of oil and gas.

A few questions there, but just some clarity on some of those would be great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to oblige. Well, the race to the bottom means basically lowering labour standards, environmental standards, and not being able to afford education and health care as is necessary.

I want to talk about another aspect, since you raised it, in terms of how we make sure that our people are working, and that has to do with the government policies around bitumen in our province and the mass export of unprocessed bitumen, creating billions of dollars of investment in the United States and thousands of jobs while we here in Alberta have lost in the last year I think 35,000 jobs.

5:50

There are many ways to be competitive, but certainly to let, as the Minister of Energy said in the House yesterday, the market decide where jobs are created with our resources I think is a complete abdication of the government's responsibility to look at how we build our economy in an intelligent way. That hemorrhaging of capital and jobs to the United States is something the government needs to address.

In terms of the money that we get from the export of our raw materials, that is fine as far as it goes, but unless we make sure that we take full advantage of value-added opportunities, then we will lose against what we could potentially have. It's fine to say that we get a lot of money from exporting natural gas with all of the volatiles in it to petrochemical industries in Chicago and so on and that we export our bitumen to the United States and allow them to build the upgraders and to create the jobs and to create the investment in a number of states in the United States. We're rich for now, so we lose sight of the fact that we are letting much of the riches that we possess slip through our fingers to the benefit of others.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I've always believed that the government's job is to create a level playing field and that business will come if there's money to be had. I think it's a false economy when the government interferes with that because it truly isn't what we talk about when we talk about a free market. If the marketplace is always depending on tax dollars to make their profit, then I'm not sure how we can call that a pure free market.

What I would like to see: in terms of them wanting competition, I would like to compete with the United States and have our own upgraders. I think that would be a good use of the taxpayers' money because ultimately we would have more control, and in the end competitiveness is about control. Maybe we should be looking at controlling more of our value-added jobs. If the member could comment on that.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I agree generally with what the member has said. To me it's a question of policy.

**The Acting Speaker:** The next speaker, the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the lateness of the hour, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]





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