



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

Issue 11

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant that we, the members of our province's Legislature, fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day and every day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House in his position as vice-chair of the Legislative Offices Committee.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and to the Assembly the members of the 2009-10 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission, who are sitting in your gallery. This commission was established on July 31 of '09 with the daunting task of coming up with some 87 constituencies using a whole number of factors to make sure that they are fair and equitable. The commission had a series of hearings across the province, and now they are issuing their interim report. I am pleased to introduce the members of the commission. We have the hon. Judge Ernie Walter, chair of the boundaries commission, and the members: Keith Archer, Peter Dobbie, Allyson Jeffs, and Brian Evans. Of course, Brian was a member of this Assembly and also a minister. I see they have with them one of their very able administrators, Karen Sawchuk. I would ask our guests to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 44 very special guests from Win Ferguson school. The students are accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Ali Dixon and Mrs. Claudia Klippenstein, and parent helpers today are Mrs. Robin Lee, Mrs. Monica Schouten, Mrs. Donna MacLean, and Mr. Paul Kristensen. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a researcher funded through one of our Alberta Innovates corporations, Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions. Dr. Braden Manns, who is sitting in the members' gallery, is a physician, researcher, and an associate professor in the division of nephrology in the department of medicine at the University of Calgary. The chronic disease team that he helps lead brings together 23 specialists from across Canada and abroad in fields ranging from medicine to law, from nursing to knowledge transfer. Together they are tackling an urgent matter in health care, and that's how to help people with chronic medical conditions like diabetes and high blood

pressure to better manage their health. His research is just one example of the excellent work coming out of Alberta Innovates. Again, Dr. Manns is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this gallery.

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

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce some staff from my department who are on an orientation tour. I met with them in my office. Right about now they're probably wondering what they've gotten themselves into, but it's my honour to welcome them to this Chamber. I'd like to introduce Wendy Mallery, Nnam Okoye, Lena Borle, Wendy Joy, Marilyn Quaedvlieg, Kerrie Henson, Amanda Goulet, Michael Michalski, George Wiebe, LauraAnn Sedgwick, Christy Ma, Raena Chatwin, Dana Belyk, Teresa Babinski, Marcia White, Kathie Heard, Shannon Klaus, Gerhard Krueger, Lesley MacAllister, and Karen Bilinske. I'd ask them to rise and please accept the traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly six human resources staff members who provide shared corporate services to both my ministry and Alberta Transportation. If I could please introduce Stacy Gloster, Donna-Joy Loe, Andrea Hayes, Michelle Sadler, Anita Belisle, and Khadija Allidina. They are here today to tour the Legislature Building. They are seated and have risen in the members' gallery, and I'd like all members to give them the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the members of the Assembly over a hundred individuals and families and organizations from across the province who've come here to show their concern for service cuts to persons with developmental disabilities. Every one of these Albertans is tremendously concerned that the millions of dollars in cuts will leave providers and parents scrambling to find adequate supports. I would ask our guests to rise or wave if they wish and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

2010 Arctic Winter Games

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, sports is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle and a strong population. From March 6 to 13 Grande Prairie will host the 21st annual Arctic Winter Games. This is an exciting opportunity for our province as participants from Alaska, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, northern Alberta, Nunavik, Nunavut, Greenland, the Sami people from the Sapmi region, and the Russian province of Yamal-Nenets come together in Grande Prairie to compete and celebrate their cultures.

The Arctic Winter Games are a unique celebration of sport and culture. They promote traditional aboriginal games based on survival in the north. There are three categories of sports that are included in the games: major sports; northern sports, including Inuit games, Déné games, snowshoeing, dog mushing, and Inuit wrestling; as well as emerging sports. The games offer a venue where developing athletes and officials from across the north can meet and enhance their athletic skills and share their respective cultures.

The original philosophy behind these games is athletic competition, cultural exhibition, and social interchange. While participants of the games are looking forward to competing in this biennial event, the constituents of Grande Prairie-Wapiti are very excited to have the opportunity to showcase their city and their hospitality. If you're interested in attending the Arctic Winter Games or want further information on the events, please visit www.awg2010.org.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of this Assembly join me in welcoming participants, athletes, volunteers, performers, and spectators from all over the north to Grande Prairie.

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

Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today a hundred Albertans have joined us here in the Legislature to express their disappointment and justifiable anger at the callousness of this administration's decision to claw back supports so desperately needed by people with developmental disabilities. Citizens who live with conditions such as autism, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome need the compassion, assistance, and understanding of a caring community. That community starts with their immediate family and friends, but it also encompasses all Albertans.

We're all part of a civilization, a civil society, with common rights and obligations. One of our duties is to ensure that people with special needs are looked after. Responsible leadership would make absolutely sure that there's enough public funding to meet the special needs of the people, including those who have joined us in the Legislature today and the many thousands of others with developmental disabilities across the province.

I applaud the men and women who devote their lives to caring for people with developmental disabilities. With meagre resources they are doing their absolute best to provide sons and daughters and the people they support with a quality of life.

1:40

Unfortunately, this administration is not providing sufficient support to allow people with developmental disabilities and their families and caregivers to live with a level of dignity that is their birthright. Millions of dollars in cuts have left aid providers and parents scrambling and desperate and vulnerable Albertans in crisis. This is the result of poor financial planning. These are not the actions of a compassionate and responsible government. I would ask the Premier to reconsider these cruel PDD cuts. The worth of a civilization is judged on how it treats its most vulnerable. Today this government is failing that important test.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Youth Apprenticeship Program

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately 6,000 students, 25 schools, five off-campus schools are part of Northern Lights school division 69, otherwise known as NLSL. NLSL

operates one of our three youth apprenticeship program, or YAP, pilot projects in this province.

As a former teacher of the Northern Lights school district I am very proud of the work that NLSL is doing with this particular program. In the YAP program students begin in grade 7 and continue through grade 12 to explore career options through integrative learning of both trades and other professional vocations. Students can earn certificates in WHMIS, first aid, H₂S awareness, transportation of dangerous goods awareness, bear awareness, hunter education, and job safety skills.

YAP is currently a pilot project that expires in June of 2010. Northern Lights is hoping to extend the funding for the Lac La Biche program for the next three years as well as exploring the possibility of expanding it into my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

The youth apprenticeship program has successfully improved students' achievement, enhanced program choices, and increased participation and opportunities for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students. One hundred and seventy-five students participated in YAP, all of whom remain in school. Six of these students are currently enrolled in registered apprenticeship programs in Alberta. In 2009 these students accessed close to 15 per cent of the province's scholarships in the registered apprenticeship program.

Mr. Speaker, the YAP project has been a huge success for students in the Northern Lights school division. It gives them the ability to learn in a setting outside of the classroom through hands-on experience. This can increase their chances of staying in school and teaches them to develop skill sets that will encourage them to take an active role in their education. It also gives students who want to pursue a career in the trades a way to gain experience and understand the importance of applied learning as a means of achieving their goals.

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

International Mother Language Day

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November 1999 the United Nations proclaimed the first-ever International Mother Language Day. This date is celebrated each February 21 around the world. This holiday shows the importance that language has in our society as this is how we express our culture and heritage. International Mother Language Day is a great way to become more aware of other languages and cultures around the world.

Mr. Speaker, Canada is a country where we are very lucky to speak our native language and celebrate our culture freely. This is something that many other countries do not allow, and we should be thankful for our freedom. I immigrated to Canada 30 years ago from Punjab, India. It is important to me that I am able to speak my native language, Punjabi, and can pass it on to my children.

In Alberta we have many people who speak languages other than English and French. Some schools offer language programs to help children retain their language if their mother tongue is not English or French, at the same time allowing English children to learn other languages and cultural traditions.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency alone Kildare elementary school has an excellent Chinese Mandarin bilingual program, as does Londonderry school. Father Leo Green school has wonderful French and Spanish immersion programs. J.J. Bowlen junior high school will open a program for Spanish language and culture in the fall, and M.E. LaZerte offers courses in Mandarin and Ukrainian as well.

I would like to thank all the parents, teachers, and those in the community who promote diversity of language. May God bless our country for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Royalty Framework

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the University of Calgary released a study concluding that Alberta ranks dead last in terms of competitiveness for oil and gas, citing this PC government's new royalty framework as the biggest reason. This policy has been among the most harmful and misguided public policy debacles in Alberta's history. It has severely damaged our international reputation as a stable and business-friendly jurisdiction to invest in. It has put thousands of Albertans out of work. It has bankrupted hundreds of small businesses, and ironically an initiative intended to increase revenues to the Provincial Treasury has actually resulted in the exact opposite.

Many of us have family and friends who are struggling to find work, and every time I talk with them, they simply ask why. Why would they do this? This government should have known better. They should have known that the answer to increasing provincial revenues is not to raise taxes on business. All this does is drive out investment and jobs and the income earners that pay taxes. They should have known the importance of the rule of law and respect for contracts in creating the stability necessary to attract and retain industry and businesses and the jobs and tax revenue they provide. They should have known that you can't overhaul the entire regulatory framework governing an industry without first consulting with that industry to make sure there are no unintended consequences.

That shale gas, for instance, was changing the investment landscape. Industry knew that information long before the new royalty framework. Many of this Premier's MLAs knew it and told the Premier so, yet it fell on deaf ears. Now the government, realizing its mistake, has undertaken a competitiveness review. This review is welcomed and needed, and I hope they get it right this time, but the government also says they want to move on. Well, for those whose jobs, businesses, and dreams have been shattered by this government's devastating carelessness, moving on is not so simple.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Affordable Supportive Living Initiatives

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Much has been said in this House over the last few weeks about continuing care options for seniors in our province. I am very proud to stand here and say that providing assistance to low-income seniors and persons with disabilities is, in fact, a major priority for this government. Evidence of this priority is reflected with the Seniors and Community Supports ministry leading the initiative to improve the choice and availability of continuing care accommodations in this province. This initiative is a priority through Alberta's continuing care strategy, now in full implementation, by increasing the supply of spaces and choice in the continuing care system.

This commitment continues, Mr. Speaker. For the 2010-11 fiscal year this government has budgeted \$50 million for the affordable supportive living initiative, or ASLI, to help develop 500 more affordable supportive living long-term care and, I should add, group home spaces in Alberta. Since 1999 and including the funding in this year's budget, approximately \$465 million in provincial capital funding has gone toward helping to build and modernize 9,000 affordable continuing care spaces across this province. This level of funding speaks volumes about our government's commitment to assisting vulnerable Albertans.

To help build spaces for these Albertans, the Alberta capital bonds were recently placed for sale. This innovative approach provides us

with the opportunity to invest in the future of our province and at the same time help to address the changing accommodation needs of seniors and persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, there are a few important facts regarding ASLI funding that I think are worth mentioning and reminding members about. First of all, funding for these projects contains operator agreements that require a 22-year plan to ensure the project can continue to operate as an affordable supportive living facility. The accommodation rates charged in these facilities are capped at the maximum residential long-term rate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 204

Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010. That's Bill 204.

This bill would limit year-over-year increases in government spending to the rate of inflation plus population growth or the average spending of Canada's remaining nine provinces, whichever number is higher. This bill is, I believe, a critical step in reducing our province's \$7.5 billion deficit and preserving the Alberta advantage for future generations.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

1:50

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 6 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly and by doing so make public the interim report of the 2009-2010 Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission entitled Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries, and Names for Alberta. Each member will receive a copy of the report as soon as I table this.

Oral Question Period

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

PDD Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today in the House we have roughly a hundred guests whose quality of life has been negatively affected because of government changes to the persons with developmental disabilities program. They have sent me the following basic questions they want asked to the Premier. To the Premier: what did the province do with the \$1,403.60 raised at a bottle drive in January and delivered here on February 10?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to supporting adults with developmental disabilities, and we're also committed to ensuring that the program that we have in place is sustainable for years to come to support all Albertans with developmental disabilities. The PDD program continues to be well funded. I believe it's in the area of about \$600 million.

Any of the other details with respect to the program the minister responsible can answer.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the Premier. According to the Seniors and Community Supports business plan and budget for 2010 the total estimate for direct operations for PDD, their community boards, is \$15.8 million. How many individuals would this support?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The PDD program is very important to this government and to all MLAs in this Assembly. I know that first-hand because I've heard from many of them. I'm committed to this program, and I can tell you that with the direct program we have for our people with developmental disabilities, in Michener I know we have approximately 270 people that are served in that program.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we're looking for some evidence that this money is being spent on the delivery of care to persons with developmental disabilities. What does the \$119 million under supports to delivery system pay? What does it pay for, and why is there such a large difference in how this is allocated across the six PDD regions?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the PDD program that we have here in Alberta is one of the very best in Canada. This program and our budget show our commitment to people with developmental disabilities. The goal of the program is to help our people with developmental disabilities to live the most independent and the best life that they can live. I'd like to quote my friends from the Camrose Association for Community Living where they say: our purpose is to help our friends with developmental disabilities live their best life.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today will also be to the Premier and given to me by the people that are visiting in our gallery. To the Premier. Typically board members are volunteers, certainly in the nonprofit organizations, that provide most of the supports to individuals funded by PDD. Why does it cost \$915,000 for board governance for PDD?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, once again speaking about the PDD program being one of the very best in Canada, we have six regional boards, and the purpose of the boards is to be able to contract and develop programs within the different regions. Things are different in northern Alberta, obviously, than they are in southern Alberta. They are a very important part of the delivery of our program and making contracts with our service agencies so that we are able to give the best possible programs and services to people with developmental disabilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Madam Minister. I think we understand the difference between what they do, the care that they deliver, but I think the question was: what is the discrepancy between being able to run boards with volunteers and actually having to pay \$915,000 for board governance?

My next question would be: with the estimates and target budget of 2010-11 and 2011-12 being the same as the 2009-10 forecast of \$597 million . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I would like to say is that because this program is so important to this government, we want to make sure that the program is very consistent throughout the province. We want to make sure that there's clarity in the program. We want to make sure that there's efficiency and effectiveness, especially effectiveness, to the services that we provide. The most important things besides all of those is that this program is sustainable now and into the future. So we have a plan in place. It's our six-priority action plan, which we have travelled across the province and talked to people about to make this an even better program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the budget debate the minister of seniors stated that they were projecting PDD clients to increase from 50 to 100 people in the coming year. How does the minister expect to deal with the AUPE increases, annualized cost for individuals who have come into the service and that the budget is still being held at the '09-10 rate?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the member across is absolutely correct when she says that our budget remains level. I think that's a wonderful accomplishment considering what's happening in these times. We are always looking for efficiencies in our program so that we can support our people with developmental disabilities, so we will be looking for those efficiencies, and any savings that we find within my ministry will go directly to the front line for people with disabilities.

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

Competitiveness Review of Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. An interesting report came out today from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, comparing Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the state of Texas. The report states that Alberta is the least competitive of those jurisdictions for oil and gas investment. This is extremely concerning. To the Premier: what are the Premier's thoughts about the conclusions this report presents?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it clearly follows what the government has in place. We have the Competitiveness Act before this House that's being debated. We want to ensure that we're the best place to do business in the North American continent. There have been substantial changes in not only price but in the availability of gas in shale, and that's changed the situation considerably. So we're waiting for the competitiveness review to be done and also completion of the act so that we can undertake putting the competitiveness review in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I asked the Minister of Energy about upcoming royalty changes, he stated, "The framework itself is in place and will stay in place." Does the Premier now think that more needs to be done than the tweaks to the payouts that the minister is considering?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we will have the most competitive and innovative economy in North America. I just ask him to wait and listen for the completion and the presentation of the report, which will be here soon.

Mr. Taylor: You're not asking me to wait; you're asking 78,000 unemployed Albertans to wait.

We're hearing these days of record land sales in the province because of the interest in the Duvernay shale gas play, and you might almost be able to kid yourself into thinking that happy days are here again if it weren't for those 78,000 unemployed and were it not for this School of Public Policy report. To the Premier: is the province still committed to its own competitiveness review?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes, we are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Distracted Driving

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. A recently released health and safety report blames distracted driving for the death of an Edmonton teenager last summer. Distracted driving kills, and this government's refusal to introduce legislation to stop it amounts to negligence. The Transportation minister makes excuses about enforcement while drivers glued to cellphones continue plowing through stop signs. Why has this Minister of Transportation failed to implement the recommendations of a standing committee of this Legislature and draft legislation to stop drivers from talking and texting while driving?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member is speaking about was a very, very tragic incident. This issue is a little more complex than what the member is talking about. We do have legislation in this province that deals with distracted driving. It's a very severe penalty of \$402, I think, for the fine and six demerits, and because it's so severe, it doesn't get handled a lot. Let me tell you . . .

2:00

The Speaker: No. I'm sorry. We may get it next time.
The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. That's just smoke.

Every day that this government stalls, innocent Albertans risk becoming the latest victim of a distracted driver. In 2008 the RCMP reported that more than 300 people were killed in areas that they patrol and nearly 2,000 injured by distracted drivers. Pedestrians and motorists are dying on this minister's watch, and he is refusing to take action to stop it. When will this minister take action and ban the use of cellphones and texting while driving?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working hard at that every day. One thing that we want to make sure of is that we still push education on this system. The big thing is public safety here. We want to make sure that we keep people's eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel. Let me tell you that we can't just pick one-offs and do like everyone else, just pick cellphones as a distraction. There's a large number of distractions, and we're trying to put them all together and give the police another tool to keep our highways safe.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's been almost two years since a standing committee of this Legislature dealt with this issue, and the minister is still stalling. Every other province except one recognizes that drivers on cellphones can kill people and has done something

about it. By failing to act, the minister is leaving responsible motorists and pedestrians at the mercy of those who text and talk behind the wheel. Why is he failing to protect Albertans by refusing to introduce cellphone legislation to protect the people of this province?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we are working on that legislation. We're working on the big picture of the legislation because we want to make sure we get it right. We want to make sure that it's practical, enforceable, and effective. In order to do that, we have to get it right. We will get it right, and we will bring it forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Health Services in Grande Prairie Area

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents from the Grande Prairie region are concerned about the current condition of and access to hospitals in our area. We currently have one of the oldest hospital facilities in the province at Beaverlodge and desperately need a regional hospital in Grande Prairie. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us the status of the study his department is conducting on what a regional hospital facility should be and what a rural hospital facility should be?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The purpose of Alberta's service optimization review of capital projects was to in fact ensure that we were providing the right services in the communities aforementioned and/or to identify any gaps in those services, similarly, in the locations mentioned. The general rule of thumb when talking about regional hospitals is that they're designed to provide a very broad spectrum of services and to function as a go-to place for a much broader population base, whereas rural hospitals are smaller and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. When can the residents of Grande Prairie and area expect a new regional hospital to be built?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, a lot of input has been provided to the review of that issue both from a community perspective and from Alberta Health Services perspective in terms of what they are looking to deliver there. Our three-year capital plan will be released at the end of March, around March 31, I hope, and at that time we'll have the announcements for the places that we're proceeding with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question to the same minister: what other actions is the minister taking to make sure that residents of Grande Prairie have timely access to the medical services they need?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the actions that I'm personally taking is that I'm travelling up there in about two or three weeks, I believe, and I would invite the hon. member who has asked

the question to join me. I'll be visiting the QE II hospital there. I should also mention that one of the things we're doing right now is working with that community to support a capital project plan with respect to the emergency department and the endoscopy department. Those are some positive things, and they'll be completed next year.

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

Grande Prairie Bone and Joint Clinic

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's an important day for health care in Grande Prairie. The bone and joint clinic at the QE II hospital in Grande Prairie reduced waiting times and human suffering by accelerating hip and knee surgery, yet despite the surge in orthopaedic funding announced last week, this clinic in Grande Prairie is being disbanded this week. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: who made the decision to phase out this program, and why?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the funding being phased out or ended per se. What I do know is that the current arrangement expires I think at the end of this fiscal year, but that issue is up to Alberta Health Services to review. As people here know, I'm meeting with them later tonight. Hon. member, I'd be pleased to address that question with Alberta Health Services later this evening.

Dr. Taft: Well, please do so because my information, which is very firm, is that they basically took their last patient on Monday.

Again to the same minister: what steps will be taken to ensure that the people of the Peace Country have similar access to orthopaedic surgery as the people of Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think we should make it clear that the clinic being talked about didn't actually, to my knowledge at least, perform surgeries at the site. They did more of the co-ordination of ensuring that the services got provided somewhere in the region around there. So if there's an issue here with respect to services for Peace River or other locations you've mentioned, then that, too, can come under the discussion this evening, and I'll make sure it does.

Dr. Taft: It was a co-ordinating service that, as I said, accelerated wait times and helped reduce people's suffering, and it should be continued.

Again to the same minister. Alberta Health Services has a hip and knee steering committee, which had a role – and I know this in writing – in deciding to fund this clinic last June. Who are the members of the Alberta Health Services hip and knee steering committee, what's their mandate, and exactly who are they accountable to?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'll get the names that the member seeks; I don't have them with me, obviously. I know that about six years ago when we created this hip and knee steering committee as a subgroup of a larger management committee, its purpose really was to look at reducing wait times and managing the times better. I think they did a good job, hon. member. I'm curious to know about the funding issue that you mentioned, so I will find out about that and get back to you with the answers.

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

Grasshopper Control

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dry conditions last fall provided excellent conditions for grasshoppers to lay their eggs, and counts of grasshoppers last summer indicated a strong possibility of an extreme problem for farmers this year if dry conditions persist this spring. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What's the minister doing in preparation for such an occurrence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are keeping track of the conditions and where the conditions are the most severe with respect to the possibility of an infestation of grasshoppers. It does show a number of spots in our province that could have an infestation from moderate to severe. I'm particularly concerned with some areas southwest of Edmonton and in the Grande Prairie area and some areas in northern Alberta, but we are monitoring it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there adequate resources in the minister's budget to provide the necessary assistance to farmers similar to what happened in the last outbreak?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is always access to disaster funding should the outbreak be severe and be something beyond what our programs normally offer. I think it's worth noting that there are risk management tools and insurance programs in place that are heavily supported by government for instances of grasshopper infestations and other areas. I would hope that producers are looking at that risk.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. In previous years farmers have encountered shortages of the chemical to control grasshopper infestations. Can the minister assure farmers that there will be adequate supplies of product should such an event occur this year?

Mr. Hayden: Well, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the chemical is a private industry, but they're reading the same reports that government is and are looking at the same information. My expectation is that because it's the private sector, the chemical industry will be gearing up their supplies for the possibility of this infestation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

2:10 Support for Children with Disabilities

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The nature of care that not only protects but nurtures children with disabilities in Alberta is of the utmost importance in ensuring that they experience the best quality of life possible. It is therefore essential that there be appropriate placements and ongoing evaluation of the care that is provided for vulnerable disabled children. To the minister: given the highly specific individual needs of disabled children, can the minister briefly introduce and follow up in writing what quality and

quantity of training specific to physical or mental disabilities is required for Children and Youth Services staff above and beyond the limited staff members in the family support for children with disabilities program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that the family support for children with disabilities program is highly valued by our families. We did have a survey, and 86 per cent of families said that they value this program and recognize the good support and services that we do offer because it's customized to the needs of the child. I know this member does care about this area. I've seen you at many organizations out in the community, hon. member. What you've requested in writing – I think it would be the multidisciplinary teams that you're looking at for the specialized services – I can provide.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the follow-up, Madam Minister.

Is the minister absolutely certain that all Children and Youth Services staff are adequately trained and have the necessary understanding and experience to provide the proper placements and supports to Alberta's vulnerable disabled children?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely certain. I go back to what I said earlier about the families, to what we hear back from the families. I've been told that this is a leading program across Canada, and that's because of the good specialized support services that we offer to families. This is a \$120 million area of the budget. We've added another \$5 million in this coming budget to the programs, and it's with that support. As I said, hon. member, I will provide the information you are seeking.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What type of follow-up does the ministry conduct to ensure the well-being of disabled children after they have been placed in either foster care or kinship care? How frequently does the support evaluation occur to ensure that the placement and care continue to be appropriate?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, with the foster care program there was a review that was done two years ago. That review did show that there needed to be more extensive assessment with families, and that would include families with children with disabilities. That assessment is, of course, face-to-face interviews. Those have increased on a monthly basis as well as on a quarterly basis. I can get back to you as well about the orientation, the home training, and the follow-up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Athabasca River Water Management

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since an important portion of the oil sands is in my constituency, my constituents take great interest in the management of this important resource. The Cumulative Environmental Management Association recently released recommendations to better manage the lower Athabasca River. One

area of contention is the amount of water used by industry during periods of extreme low flow. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What action is the government taking to move forward on the association's recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this report is one that was conducted at the request of our department, so we're pleased to have it. It's to be used in the implementation of phase 2 of our in-stream flow needs regime on the Athabasca River. I'm pleased to note that this is a multistakeholder process, and we've come a long way towards having a consensus report and consensus recommendation. I can assure the member that along with Fisheries and Oceans we'll be acting on the recommendations in the report.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. I understand that the current water allocation to oil sands operations on the Athabasca River is only 2 per cent of the average annual river flow. The actual industry withdrawal is even less, about 1 per cent of the average flow. Furthermore, this minister has often expressed great confidence and assurance regarding the effectiveness of the existing water management framework for the Athabasca River. With all this in mind, why is an updated framework even necessary?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the ultimate goal in all of this is to maintain a high degree of protection on the Athabasca River. We consistently review our policies, and we really strive for continuous improvement. Clearly, we're not intending to get rid of what already works. Things are reasonably good. This framework is designed to deal with the longer term approach and, as I said in my response to the original question, to ensure that we protect the health of the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. The minister constantly notes that there have been 40 years of water quality monitoring in the oil sands region, but activities in the region have increased significantly in recent years. What type of monitoring is the government actually doing right now?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the Athabasca River and its tributaries have continuous monitoring at 11 sites in the region. We also audit the monitoring of the data that is collected by the operators operating within the region, and we have participating in the regional aquatics monitoring program more than a hundred water quality stations throughout the region. So as I have pointed out, there is a significant amount of ongoing monitoring of this river.

Electoral Reform

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the recent changes to the mission and vision of Elections Alberta highlight the inadequacies of the current approach to democratic renewal in Alberta. While the former Chief Electoral Officer engaged and encouraged the voting public, his replacement seems to have a less ambitious agenda. Why won't the minister admit what Albertans already know? Real democratic reform to Alberta's electoral system is not on the government agenda.

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's legislation coming before this House very shortly that's going to deal with a number of great recommendations that were made by both the current Chief Electoral Officer and the former Chief Electoral Officer. I would say that the future of democracy in Alberta is certainly well and good in place, and he shouldn't be predicting anything else.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Stakeholder groups have spoken to me about what they perceive to be a wilful blindness to solve the problems that have been identified to the government many years ago. An example of this is providing university students with the ability to choose their ordinary residence for the purpose of voting. Why does this government refuse to act when these Albertans are asking for these types of changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We think that's an issue of a great deal of importance, as did the former Chief Electoral Officer. We've carefully reviewed the legislation, and I believe students do have that right at the moment.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I realize that the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of this Assembly, but it baffles me why this Legislature would hire an individual who does not want to actually promote individuals voting in elections. What bothers me more is the fact that this minister appears to be satisfied with a 41 per cent voter participation rate in Alberta. To that end, how many of the former electoral reforms will the Justice minister be bringing forward out of the 180 recommendations?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, the legislation will be before this House shortly, and the hon. member will be able to see that for himself. I'm not going to debate that ahead of time. Mr. Speaker, the other thing that I think is very important to discuss here is this constant association between the voter turnout and whether or not democracy is in peril. In this very House one hon. member from this member's caucus speculated on 10 or 15 reasons why people may or may not have voted in the last election, and none of them had to do with democracy.

Legislated Spending Controls

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, today I introduced a bill that legislates a cap on government spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth. Several Alberta Chambers of Commerce chapters, the Taxpayers Federation, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Fraser Institute, and multiple financial policy experts have repeatedly recommended this type of legislation as a critical cornerstone of a responsible fiscal plan for this province as we move forward. To the minister of finance: does he support this type of legislation?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I believe there's a private member's bill coming before the House on this subject. The principle, of course, I support it, and so does everybody here. But as we've had many discussions, putting that into an actual statutory requirement causes certain issues. If you look at what's happening in most of the U.S. states that have those types of rules right now, you're seeing massive cuts to education, law enforcement, health care. There needs to be some flexibility there that that statute law . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Anderson: Thanks. Actually, in those other jurisdictions it's the no-debt rule that's hurting them, not the spending cap rule. That's something that should be looked into.

Just prior to the Premier's leadership review last November he promised Albertans and PC Party members uneasy with his leadership that he would limit spending increases to inflation plus population growth. The Premier broke this promise a mere 90 days later with Budget 2010. Talk is cheap on this issue. It has to be legislated. If it's not, it won't happen. To the same minister: will he do the right thing for ourselves and for our kids and enshrine this important principle in legislation?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I might remind the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere that this issue came before the party in Red Deer last November and was actually defeated. We usually listen a little bit to what our party congress says. Again, we're going to debate this issue next week, and we look forward to a full discussion.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I've heard this minister prior to his most recent appointment talk over and over again publicly, and eloquently I might add, about how off track our province's finances have wandered and the need for this exact type of legislated fiscal restraint. To the minister: now that he is in a position to make a real permanent difference on this issue, will he step up and champion this piece of legislation into law?

Dr. Morton: I can only assume, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere must be very pleased that I'm now the minister of finance for the government of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Employment Standards Information Program

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the government launched an employment standards campaign, and I believe it's called Tell Your Boss Where to Go. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Mr. Minister, with an ominous title like this could you please clarify what the campaign is all about and, as such, how you can justify spending this kind of money during these times of very scarce resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Tell Your Boss Where to Go campaign is simply about educating our young workforce about the rights and obligations that they have relevant to safety and labour standards. Indeed, it's a costly venture to educate, but we have cut the spending from \$700,000 to \$350,000 for this campaign. In the long run it saves Albertans money, it saves lost time, it saves injury times, and it's important that young people are informed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: I guess I would say thanks that you managed to cut this program in half from \$700,000 to \$350,000, but just the same wouldn't it make more sense to use this \$350,000 to hire more employment standards officers to enforce the code?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, for \$350,000 we probably would be able to hire about four compliance officers for one year. The benefit of education is long term. If properly educated, young people will prevent themselves from being injured, prevent their colleagues from being injured, so I think that it's a much more long-term positive effect that we will have. It's very important that they know their rights and exercise their rights.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: in keeping with the campaign theme, I'm just wondering if the minister might share what is the most effective way and whether he has ever told his boss where to go to find this information.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the hon. member is referring to my wife or the Premier, but I have to tell you that I haven't had the need to tell either one where to go. Both of them treat me, although differently, rather well. I would encourage all Alberta workers to tell their bosses where to go to get information on labour standards. There's a very easy way to find out. If you want to go on our website, go to hirestandards.alberta.ca.

Thank you.

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

Energy Efficiency

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Window rebates, the inclusion of rental properties in rebate initiatives, and support for walking and cycling infrastructure are all smaller but significant initiatives to help reduce emissions. Further areas for the government to pursue are greener building codes and legislation to support the construction and demolition waste reduction program. To the Minister of Environment. Construction waste makes up 25 per cent of our total waste in Alberta, but only 10 per cent is recycled. When will the minister introduce construction and demolition waste reduction legislation? It's ready to go. It was supposed to come in the fall. Will we see it this spring?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we're currently engaged in conversations with the Alberta Construction Association and others associated with this initiative. We have a memorandum of understanding in place. I can advise the member that that dialogue is ongoing, and I am hopeful that we will be able to move forward as soon as possible.

Ms Blakeman: That was a nonanswer.

To the same minister: since 96 per cent of Albertans feel that conservation and energy efficiency in our homes is important and 86 per cent of Albertans are willing to pay more for this feature when purchasing a new home, when will the minister increase the energy efficiency requirements for new homes in the provincial building codes? That's directed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I wasn't paying attention to the question.

Ms Blakeman: Well, that's typical but unfortunate.

Back to the Minister of Environment. Since there is a high degree of support for legislated energy efficiency targets and the govern-

ment's own 2008 climate change strategy promised it would develop an energy efficiency act, when will the minister introduce energy efficiency legislation?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of energy efficiency is one that's critical if we're going to be able to accomplish the much-needed commitment that we have to CO₂ reduction in our overall climate change strategy. That being said, the legislation that's already in place, the climate change and emissions management legislation, has significant amount of authority under our regulation-making powers, and we anticipate that we'll probably have a two-step approach. We'll be moving forward under existing legislation and then introducing new . . .

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

Market Modified Tuition Fees

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard concern from constituents, students, and educators that the proposed market modified based tuition fee increase to professional faculties would negatively impact accessibility for students with limited financial means, rural students, and students with disabilities. As well, students who intend to pursue a career inside the academic research arena definitely would not make as much money as those who practise. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What mechanism do you have in place to ensure equitable access for these students in the face of tuition increases?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to clarify that the market modifier question is really about some of the postsecondary institutions in the province feeling that in a few programs tuition may have been capped too low in 2004, and they requested that opportunity to make the case to me. We've said yes, that we would be open to them making the case, but it's a one-shot deal.

To address the question with regard to equitable access, that is certainly a priority of this government and this Premier. We've made significant changes over the last several years to our financial assistance program to assist our students. We increased the spousal earnings exemption.

Ms Woo-Paw: With the debt remuneration program removed and students having to rely more on loans, would the minister consider providing students impacted by this increase a longer period to pay off the loan, a longer interest-free period, or waiving a portion of their loan when they graduate, stay, and work within the province for a set period of time?

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, no decision has been made to increase tuition for any professional programs above the CPI cap. If and when that decision is made, we're going to ensure that it's fair and it's equitable to all students. I'd also like to clarify that we've not removed our debt relief program. We still ensure the debt above set threshold is forgiven for qualified graduates to help them ensure that they have manageable debt loads, which is something – again, the affordability framework in this province I would match up against any province in Canada. We're improving our repayment assistance plan to provide more flexibility to grad students.

Ms Woo-Paw: Again to the same minister: when will you be making your decision on the proposed tuition increases so students can plan accordingly?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to discussing the estimates in the House for our department because of the great things that we have done in terms of student finance, increasing the living allowances, increasing the lifetime loan maximums, but also we don't take the issue lightly as it relates to the market modifiers. We want to make sure that the decisions have the appropriate level of due diligence, that the institutions have the appropriate time to prepare their proposals, that we have the appropriate time to assess those proposals and make sure that they're covering off what we said we wanted to cover off, and then we'll make those decisions. It is one of the top priorities of the department right now.

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

2:30 Calgary International Airport Development

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary is now the fourth-largest city and its airport is the third busiest in the country. The airport is expanding, and we need to provide for growth around it. The deadline for commitments from the federal and provincial governments for the Calgary International Airport tunnel is approaching, and after March 1 without those commitments the deal is dead. To the Minister of Transportation: why are you killing any chance of Calgary having this necessary airport tunnel by not providing any support, sir?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely wrong again today. We supply all kinds of support to the city of Calgary. This is a municipal, local road, and the municipal district of the city of Calgary should be making their priorities on what they do with the money we give them on what roads they plan to build.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary already committed \$50 million, and the airport authority committed \$40 million. This issue is a provincial one, not just one for the city of Calgary. This government should be looking at the issue from this perspective, not running away from it. To the minister again: why isn't the government treating this vital tunnel as an issue of provincial importance?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member knows that every single issue in the province is an issue for this government, but there are ways of handling the issues. I can't run out and try and find money on a tree somewhere to start supporting areas that are not my responsibility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as it would improve Alberta's competitiveness for the federal government to open up the Calgary airport to more flights from overseas, so too would it improve Alberta's competitiveness to have an airport that is fully accessible to the whole city of Calgary and the whole of Alberta. Why is the minister unable to see the competitiveness incentive behind this?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I also have to tell the hon. member that he's into another area that's not my jurisdiction. Other airlines'

open skies agreements are the full purview of the federal government. They regulate who is allowed to fly into this country, province, wherever you want to call it. I've written letters to that minister agreeing that Alberta would love to have open skies and bring more people and allow other airlines to fly into Calgary and to fly into Edmonton so that we have more competitive rates for all of our constituents.

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

Swan Hills Treatment Centre

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Swan Hills Treatment Centre is an important facility in Alberta and has certainly served the province very well in removing thousands, maybe millions of tonnes of PCBs from the environment. However, unfortunately, it is now losing money. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Is he concerned about this operating loss, and what are his plans to rectify it?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I need to say that when the government took over the Swan Hills treatment plant, the goal was to provide a public service. The facility has done an excellent job to rid this province of PCBs and dioxins, and the primary goal is to operate a service that provides and is aimed to be efficient. There is no doubt that there is a \$23 million annual net cost.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't hear him really enunciate what his plans were to rectify the situation.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, every five years we do an assessment of that plant, and there has been a review of the facility. We are presently as a government reviewing the recommendations.

If I can add that the federal regulations call for the elimination of PCBs in Canada by 2015, and that will have a major play on the revenue of that plant . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The treatment centre processes waste other than PCBs. You mentioned the year 2015. What will happen to that waste if the plant was to close in 2015?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not just looking at the cost efficiency. We are looking at where hazardous waste can be disposed of. Presently we have 57 facilities in this province that can dispose of different forms of hazardous waste. In addition, there are many out-of-province alternatives. As I said before, the PCBs are to be eliminated – well, I hope by the federal government – by 2015, so there are facilities out there.

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

Caribou Habitat Protection

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has bad forest management policies, and threatened and endangered species are paying the price. With less than 3,000 woodland caribou left in Alberta, they are a species at risk, and it is because their natural

habitat has been decimated. For years the government has been warned about this. Why won't the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development look at the first word in his ministry's name and start protecting the habitat for caribou?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we have been protecting caribou habitat in the province of Alberta at least for 30 or 35 years. It's been very well recognized. The work that we're doing currently in the province of Alberta: again, well recognized. The caribou recovery plan and movements forward with things like the lower Athabasca regional plan all contain major pieces of work that have to do with habitat protection for caribou. We're very well aware of this, very well aware that Albertans and other Canadians . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] Thank you. The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, instead of protecting natural habitat, the government is faulting wolves. They poison them, and now they're shooting them from helicopters. In 2008 seventy-two wolves were killed, 160 more last year, and 35 so far this year. This government's plan to protect caribou must be bulk buying of bullets. Will the Minister of SRD tell this House how many more wolves will be shot from helicopters before he finally protects enough of the boreal forest to give caribou a future?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are times when the balance between predator and prey gets out of shape, and in certain areas in the province of Alberta that's what we have happening now. There are a number of reasons that the wolf population in this short term needs to be controlled. The control measures that we have put in place have helped the Little Smoky caribou herd be very successful over the last two or three years. They can't have it both ways. We need to do some control.

Ms Notley: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the last general status of Alberta wild species report says that wolves are a problem because of human activity. This report didn't say that wolves should be shot because human activity is a priority. It said that maintenance of old growth forest is critical, but this government has ignored their own recommendation for five years. Why does the minister continue to ignore recommendations critical to the survival of woodland caribou?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, what I have to say is that the wolves that I'm talking to that live at my place aren't telling me that it's me that's bothering them or creating a situation where they have become more populous. The truth of the matter is that alternate sources of food, like more deer, more elk, more rabbits, more mice, more whatever, have created a situation where populations of wolves are increasing at exponential levels in some places. Some control is necessary, and we do that to protect the caribou.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Crime and Safe Communities Recommendations

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 the government received the recommendations of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, that I had the privilege of chairing. At the press conference the Premier said that he would implement all of the recommendations that were released in this report. Sadly, that isn't happening. My question is to the Minister

of Service Alberta. Why has your department not changed FOIP legislation so that law enforcement communities, school and health agencies could share information without the risk of being sued?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to FOIP legislation and that particular matter, that is something I'm prepared to check into and get back to the hon. member on.

Mrs. Forsyth: The safe communities report also recommended that a tracking system be established and reported on key indicators such as delays in court proceedings, the number and percentage of cases where bail is provided, the number of bail violations, and the percentage of cases in which the maximum penalty is provided. Why has the Justice minister not produced legislation on requiring annual reports on this?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we run a court system quite effectively. We've introduced in the last two years as a result of the report some very significant initiatives and projects such as the court case management project. We don't need legislation; we do it as a matter of course.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister to read the report again. It was accepted by the Premier.

The issue of crime prevention is an important one, but the best crime prevention strategy is to stop crime before it takes place. To help prevent families from being overwhelmed and at risk, the task force recommended that a family source be established within the provincial government to provide information, resources, and community connections. When will the Justice minister identify that central resource, and when will it be in place, as the Premier has promised Albertans?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member has mentioned, there were 31 recommendations in that report. We've taken that very seriously. As a government we've committed half a billion dollars to do more than implement 31 recommendations, to change the way that government works, and to make sure that we honour that report. We take it very seriously.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we had the opportunity to recognize 18 different members. There were 108 questions and answers: 12 came from the opposition parties, six from the government.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: Are there additional tablings for today? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from Jan Buterman. They are commenting on their concern with the city centre inner-city school closure recommendations, particularly noting the Edmonton school board comments on being overburdened with 30,000 excess student spaces yet without explanation of the provincially mandated funding practices, and wonder how many people are aware of the demands placed upon school boards by the province when it comes to developing new facilities.

My second tabling is from David Phillips on the subject of needing a fair sales tax to pay for health care in which they note, "We need a fair sales tax to pay for health care."

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 4

Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to move second reading of Bill 4, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010.

As I outlined when I introduced this bill several days ago, this is an important bill for industry. In essence, the act is just being refreshed, though, to ensure that Alberta's legislation is consistent with federal legislation. That federal legislation is the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, 1992, which was amended in June of 2009.

Components of this bill, the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010, include giving Alberta the ability to require security plans for certain prescribed dangerous goods, requiring shippers to report lost and stolen shipments of dangerous goods, clarification of details for the manufacture and use of containers used in the transportation of dangerous goods, and introduction of an administrative penalty option that would enable Alberta Transportation and industry to deal with noncompliance issues outside the provincial court system.

This isn't adding regulation because, largely, the regulations already exist in federal legislation, but it does provide Alberta industry with protection by creating provincial jurisdiction over these issues so that it continues to be business as usual for industry here. Matching provincial legislation to federal legislation as much as possible also helps achieve some standard conditions for movement of dangerous goods within provinces and across Canada. The changes are mainly administrative in nature and minor, but it also helps protect our provincial jurisdiction over enforcing regulations.

I urge all members to support this important legislation, and I'd ask that we now adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Montrose I'd like to move second reading of Bill 6, the Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, the vision for Municipal Affairs is to create strong, safe, and sustainable communities. This bill is part of our government's response to strengthen the emergency management system across the province. Search and rescue teams support our provincial emergency services. This bill will extend the good-faith liability protection currently provided to firefighters to search and rescue workers and their organizations.

There is growing concern over potential civil litigation, making it difficult for these organizations to recruit volunteers while incurring increased insurance and administrative costs. One search and rescue group in British Columbia suspended its service over concerns of

legal liability. This is not only an Alberta issue, Mr. Speaker, but a national issue.

This bill will extend the good-faith liability protection currently provided to firefighters to search and rescue workers and their organizations while they're providing emergency rescue services under the act. By supporting search and rescue teams, we are demonstrating the government's commitment to providing safe and strong communities.

Another amendment, Mr. Speaker, will focus on the language of the act to change the current "gross negligence" standard for providing emergency services to one of "good faith." This matches the language found in the Municipal Government Act. Changing the legal standard from gross negligence to good faith would provide consistency and alignment with other legislation in Alberta that sets out a liability standard. This will also provide additional legal defences to the minister, local authorities, and their agents and help limit their exposure to lawsuits. An example is ham radio operators who perform a specialized function during an emergency on behalf of the ministry or a local authority.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, changes to the act will focus on regional emergency service delivery and will make it easy for communities to work together during an emergency. These amendments will allow for the establishment of regional service commissions, regional directors of emergency management, and other partnerships to deliver emergency management services. This will help municipalities provide a cross-jurisdictional response to a disaster, better serving their residents during a crisis. By centralizing services, the administrative, financial, and training burden placed on municipalities could be reduced.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this bill introduces changes that will help protect Alberta search and rescue teams from liability claims. Amendments will also strengthen the emergency management system by formalizing regional co-operation amongst communities. I urge members to support Bill 6, and I look forward to further discussions on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, I request that we adjourn debate at this time on Bill 6, Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

2:50 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 5

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. President of the Treasury Board first.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As we deal in Committee of the Whole with appropriation, supplementary supply, it's important to identify the fact that the huge majority of the money in these supplementary estimates is being spent on health through the H1N1 and addressing the accumulated deficit of the health board ending in March of '09. It deals with the issue of forest fires, and quite candidly it forced us to move money from different areas to accommodate spending programs by the federal government. Outside of those numbers, the bulk of the increase was in Employment and Immigration, where it's very difficult to identify where the pressures on a social system will arise given the economic conditions

that the government went through. In fact, when you take out the items that I've identified, it's actually less than one-half of 1 per cent of our total spending that was involved in it.

But a billion is a big number and deserves the attention of the Assembly, and I look forward to the discussion in Committee of the Whole.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to approach this in a couple of different sections, and the first is to talk about the process, which the hon. President of the Treasury Board has referred to in his comments. There are a couple of observations that I'd like to make. I continue to be dismayed and perplexed, actually, about why we see such frequent requests for supplementary supply and the amount and the number of departments that are affected. I have a chart in front of me that staff were kind enough to make up, and it only goes back to '99-2000. Actually, since I've been here, the '96-97 fiscal year and on, there has been at least one and often two supplementary supply estimates every year.

I accept that there are some things that you need a supplementary supply budget for; for example, forest fires. We hope there are not any. They have to put some amount in the budget, and then you deal with what you get. Fair enough. I understand that, and I would expect to see that happening. But this has become common practice with this government, and it is far, far more than covering the costs of forest fires or this year the extraordinary costs of H1N1. You can certainly see a clear explanation for why that couldn't be anticipated down to the exact dollar.

I am more concerned with what I see as a planning and perhaps a management deficit in that this is now commonplace. We just expect it, at least one or two a year, and it's covering not one or two departments but nine, 10, 12, 14 departments. Often more than half of the departments that this government administers programs through come forward in a supplementary supply estimate, and at that I have to call question. We have nine departments in front of us this year, so I'll put that on the record.

You know, the government always gets up and says: "Oh, well, come on. Give us a break. There have been all kinds of things we couldn't anticipate." But I have to say that with the resources behind the government, with the time and care and expertise they're able to call upon to work out things like the projected price of a barrel of oil within, you know, a minutia of a cent or gas or the royalty rate, they clearly have a lot of expertise to pull upon for certain areas when they're interested in it. I just feel that they get sloppy in the rest of the areas and could be doing a better job overall on tightening up their original budgeting process.

The second thing I'm seeing in the budgeting process: again, I would call it a sloppiness except that it's worse than that because there's an intent behind it. I want to be careful to convey that I think this just isn't a matter of: well, whoops, didn't pay a lot of attention. I think this is deliberate. What I'm seeing in last year's budget and this year's budget – and we see the effect of last year's budget in the supplementary supply in front of us – is a lack of budgeting. When closely questioned on items that are in particular departments and just about any department but certainly the ones I witnessed, I would often hear back from ministers: well, we're working on that; well, we're developing a policy; yeah, well, we'll figure out a way to do that; well, you know, don't forget that we've got such and such a plan or a strategy coming.

In the world that I come from, which is the not-for-profit sector, a budget is clearly a plan on exactly how you're going to spend the money, where your revenue is going to come from, how your

expenses are going to go out, and you've got to be pretty tight on that stuff. You can't say: "Yeah, I think I'm going to produce a show at the Citadel. It'll be a million bucks. It'll have some actors in it and be written by somebody, and yeah, there'll probably be costumes." You've got to know what you're doing. But that is what I'm seeing from the government, and I'm beginning to wonder if they actually are budgeting for particular programs.

You know, this year again as I questioned, the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit and I got a little snippy with each other because I said, "Where's this money going to come from that you're going to find somewhere to finance this thing that you don't have enough money for?" He said, "I'm not going to talk about that." "Excuse me? It's a budget debate. You're supposed to be able to defend to me what you're spending the money on." "Well, I'm not going to talk about that." "Really? Where are you going to get the money from? What programs are you going to take it from?" "Oh, uh, we'll see." That's what the budget is for. It's a plan of how you're going to do it, and if you can't tell me how you're going to do that as we go through the budget debates, that's telling me the government doesn't know, and that is going to put us in much deeper problems down the road.

The third observation I want to make is the amount of information that's actually contained in the supplementary supply estimates booklet that we get. Usually the requests that are coming forward under supplementary supply tend to break into a couple of different categories. We're not talking, you know, 15 different ways that that money is going to be spent. Even when you look at the health budget, which is one of the larger ones, as the President of the Treasury Board observed, it essentially breaks into four categories. I'm quoting here from page 24: "\$343,000,000 to fund Alberta Health Services' accumulated deficit as of March 31, 2009." It gives you four lines of description there, so it's breaking into not very many categories. We're not getting a heck of a lot of information here.

Let me use one of my critic portfolios as an example as to how little information is given here and how easy it is to give more information. On page 16, under the supplementary supply estimates requested for Culture and Community Spirit, one line: "This supplementary amount of \$2,888,000 is requested to provide for site reclamation costs incurred at various historic sites related to environmental liabilities that were expensed in prior years." When I questioned – and the President of the Treasury Board was kind enough to stand and give an answer – that actually covers three locations. What was the problem with listing the three locations in this booklet? It's another line of ink. Was it going to break you to just be able to say this much for this facility, this much for this facility, and this much for this facility? I'm not quite sure what all the secrecy is about, the need to sort of, you know, open the book for a quick little glimpse and then shut it again. If you want us to cooperate with this stuff, what is the problem in actually giving us the information on what this is about?

3:00

Even with the Health and Wellness budget: okay, it's the costs of responding to an H1N1 pandemic. What exactly was that? Could we get a better description of how that breaks down? Again, you've got a full page. You could fill up the whole page without it costing you more money for the booklet. It's blank. You could fill it with information; it wouldn't kill you. It contributes to the idea that this government is fixated on secrecy and keeping information to itself. I'm just trying to help you out, just trying to make you more popular than you already are and win over some more friends to your side. But, honestly, you could give us some more information there.

Housing and Urban Affairs, two lines. Look at all the page you could have filled up, telling me what you were up to with that money. That's just a wee little suggestion for you to follow up on. I think it would be helpful.

As we encourage people to become more interested in what we're doing in this Assembly, they do follow along online. They do watch the podcasts. They watch the live audio and video streaming. Some of them are getting very well educated in following us. They're interested in that kind of thing, too. So I think that just one person, one little opposition MLA standing up and saying, "You could give us more information" is going to give way to a lot more people saying: "Hey, what is this? We want to be able to see what this is about in a more reasonable way." Again, I don't want a volume. I don't need tens of pages on this. But surely you can give me more than a sentence, especially when you know what it is. It looks to me like you don't know what you were doing. You needed money to cover some kind of reclamation area in culture, but you didn't know quite what it was. So that's that little bit.

The other issues that I wanted to raise are some things that aren't in here and probably shouldn't be in here but should probably be considered in the long run.

I'm sorry. There was one more thing that came under the helpful hints section. That is the number of times that I'm seeing the government slyly present federal money as part of a provincial budget. To be honest, you're fessing up a bit more in this supplementary supply document than you have in the budget. You actually fess up someplace that this is including transfer payments from the feds. You know where it was? Employment and Immigration, I'll bet you. No, it wasn't. I've read through it recently. Sorry.

Mr. Snelgrove: Advanced ed.

Ms Blakeman: You think it's advanced ed? Yes. That's exactly right. They do fess up on page 12 for Advanced Education and Technology, right in the little documentation – good on them, little brownie points, yay, check mark – that "\$97,681,000 is offset by a transfer from the federal government under the Knowledge Infrastructure Program." Good on you. Thanks for that. But that's not always the case.

It's very interesting doing the supplementary supply budget at the same time as you're doing the following year's estimates, budgets. You might want to think about that the next time you schedule these things together because I get a lot of comparison opportunities.

Increasingly, as I say, is the number of times that the government is not admitting that something has happened which is, in fact, federal government transfers. Again, I'll go to the one that I know well, which is Culture and Community Spirit. The way the government press release read, that department officially admitted that it was cut by 1.8 per cent, yet when you looked at it, it was cut by closer to 20 per cent in most of those areas, \$35 million, but it was offset by \$30 million of capital spending. You think: oh, well, that's okay; all right. When you look at that – and I actually went through, and I dug out the federal government press releases, and there are all the dates – that \$30 million is federal money. It's not provincial money, but it's showing up in the budget for this department as though it is operating expenditure money.

I know why it's there. Because the provincial government doesn't actually own those facilities, they cannot claim any money they put into them as a capital asset or a capital expense. It gets expensed out in the year that it's in. I understand that. But to actually try to pretend that this is money that the government was putting into this: no. That requires a closer acquaintance with the truth.

Sorry. That was the final bit of observation I wanted to make about the process and the reporting structure that we're dealing with.

Now, a couple of issues that I wanted to raise as part of what I'm seeing here. I'm sorry. Would pensions come up under Employment and Immigration or under Treasury Board?

Mr. Snelgrove: Finance.

Ms Blakeman: Finance. Oh boy. I was way off. Okay.

I think that one of the things we need to look at and that I am quite concerned about is protection of Albertans' investments in private-sector pension plans. Who of us ever imagined that Nortel would go down? Never. Nobody would have thought that that one was going to happen, yet it did. The pensions that Albertans have through that company are imperilled or have been reduced or lost.

I think it is incumbent upon us to look to legislation that would better protect Albertans' money that is part of a corporate or a private-sector pension plan. In some cases, like with GM, those pension plans are invested with the unions. They're safer there, frankly. But for those that are being held by private-sector corporations, I think we have a good argument that we need to step up and protect Albertans. If it doesn't, it's going to end up in a supplementary supply document somewhere down the road because we're now having to add money to a number of assistance programs, like we're seeing in the Employment and Immigration budget, to help out Albertans.

Staying with the Employment and Immigration budget, I am frustrated with what I'm seeing here. It is important, where we have programs that are structured to assist Albertans, that we do it, that we make use of those programs, that we spend that money as appropriate. My frustration is that we are essentially in year 2 of the recession. It started in year 1. For us to have to be looking at a supplementary supply budget for training programs and higher caseloads in health benefits and a higher caseload in income support: I would have expected the government to be more on top of that.

This recession didn't start, you know, this year. It started last year. Why were we not able to better anticipate the number of people? I mean, computer modelling makes everything possible now. They can computer model how to put somebody on Mars, but we can't computer model how many Albertans are going to require the various assistance programs that exist so that we're able to budget at the beginning of a fiscal year what the uptake will be on the cases? I would have expected better.

I am surprised to see the number of programs. We've got here \$4.6 million for employment program planning and delivery. We've got \$28 million for employment and training programs for skill development and to maintain employment, \$25.9 million for health benefits due to higher caseloads and costs per case, and \$129.7 million for income supports due to higher caseloads and costs per case. That's a whack of money and a lot of people, clearly. I'm surprised that the projections were not closer to the mark. Maybe somebody is able to tell me why that happened and why we're not able to get a little closer to the mark.

The other issue – sorry. I tend to keep all these things in a file. I'll deal with that another time.

Okay. That's a great opportunity. Thank you very much for allowing me to put those observations on the record. Maybe I'll be able to hear back from somebody, which would be helpful. I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

3:10

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate how difficult it is preparing a budget, especially during a recessionary time period. I understand the need for having a supplementary supply budget. I do

believe that certain forecasting is available, and as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned, there are programs that could give us a degree of insight or forecast.

One of the things that is missing from the supplementary budget is the \$23 million, the 1 per cent difference, in the arbitrator's agreement for teachers. Now, I understand that the budgets have to be prepared well in advance, but my understanding is that the supplemental supply budget's purpose is to add on those missing factors so that the province can run smoothly. Right off the top \$23 million is missing from Education as well as any kind of increased funding to recognize special needs, school infrastructure, and so on. It's the second-largest investment this province has after health, but there's nothing additional to it, so it's basically more cuts.

Under Advanced Education and Technology while there was increased funding for student loans, there was no increased funding for grants, for bursaries, or for operational funding. As a result, the universities, most likely, at least the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, are going to be asking the government, the minister of advanced education, to allow them to increase professional faculty tuitions up to 60 per cent, which will have a dramatic door-closing effect on those faculties.

Under Culture and Community Spirit during a time of recession is a time more than any other for both our mental and physical well-being that we need the arts supported. We need to enjoy the arts. Some might call it a distraction. Others might call it an inventive celebratory spirit.

Under Employment and Immigration the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned what's happened with failing companies such as Nortel. I attended a meeting earlier in the month at the Varsity Community Association where a number of Nortel employees, many of whom had their LTD cancelled and have no idea what small percentage of their pension they'll get back, were extremely concerned. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, these people will find themselves on the dole in some form in Alberta because their company pension plans fell apart. The federal government hasn't enacted any legislation to cover these individuals; therefore, it's going to fall on the province to pick up their financial pieces, and there are quite a few of those pieces to be picked up.

In a time of recession, when we need to get people working – and a number of people have gone back or tried to get into postsecondary institutions to get upgrading – the government has cancelled funding for the Alberta Works programs. I think it was mentioned that 78,000 people were unemployed. Trying to get them upgraded and re-employed should be a focus. Unfortunately, it's not.

Under Health and Wellness I'm concerned about the amount of money that's going into private, for-profit clinic contracting versus operations performed within public facilities. Part of that problem in Calgary is that we lost half of our public facilities.

This falls under Advanced Education as well as Health and Wellness and, I guess, under Employment as well. This government did the right thing in creating a number of postsecondary spaces at the universities and at the colleges, Grant MacEwan and Mount Royal now having joined the universities, for registered nurse training. We've put out those significant subsidies to encourage nurses to train in this province, yet there had been a freeze on hiring. Now the new minister is speculating about reopening 300 beds. We have the rooms, we have the space, but we don't have the nurses to make those beds operational. That money isn't specifically tagged in this budget, so I don't know where it's going to come from.

Under Housing and Urban Affairs my concern is the reduction in rental subsidies and the fact that there's nothing left in the homeless and eviction prevention fund. We're far from being through the

recession. The minimum wage has been frozen, and I don't see a whole lot of help for individuals who are at the poverty end of the scale.

When it comes to Sustainable Resource Development, I was pleased to see that there was supplemental investment, for example, in fighting pine beetles, which was positive, but the elimination of the junior warden program, a program that gave students an opportunity to have a wilderness experience, to consider a potential education towards forestry, towards conservation, towards sustainable resource development careers – that's been cut short. These young people would have been the eyes and the ears in the parks at a very low investment cost.

Last night, of course, we had the Tourism, Parks and Recreation budget. That budget took a \$30 million hit. There's very little increase in the supplementary supply budget. What was discussed was that rather than provincial parks being expanded, there will actually be a reduction in park operations. There will be a reduction in seasonal personnel. That's a concern for me. Also, while more money is being spent promoting tourism, the actual product is being reduced because the quality of the experience is being reduced through lack of infrastructure maintenance, lack of trail maintenance, and so on. Last week we had a good discussion about the need to keep our parks vibrant.

I'm also concerned when it comes to Transportation. When I had the former responsibility of being the opposition critic for Infrastructure and Transportation, I frequently brought up the concern I had about highway 63. It's taking forever to get that key economic route twinned. In the meantime we continue to have significant loss of life on that particular highway. It also concerns me that there seems to be no plan for our east-west corridor, the twinning of highway 3. While supplementary alone can't possibly solve the problem, almost half of our highways in this province are in fair to poor condition, and that's obviously a concern.

This supplementary supply budget is part of the carry-over until April, at which time more financial announcements will probably be made. Maybe some of the concerns that I've indicated such as where we go with advanced education tuition increases or subsidized support from the government will be revealed. In the meantime there are an awful lot of Albertans living on the edge, wondering to what extent they can count on this government for support as they seek employment, as they seek further education and, in some cases, struggle just to keep a roof over their heads.

The backdrop for this play is a \$17 billion sustainability fund, and I hope that in future supplementary budgets and budgets to follow we'll see that \$17 billion invested in a sustainable, predictable, supportive way for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to start off with the usual mantra that I think you probably hear from this side, and I'm quite sure that other members in the House have probably said this to themselves as well: how on earth can a budget be balanced if you always have to come back to the trough for extra money? Certainly, I know that if families ran their budgets like that, the personal debt in Canada would be a great deal higher than what it already is, and it already is at an alarming rate.

I certainly can understand the need for supplemental funds for emergencies. But my question is that in my budget I have money put aside for, quote, emergencies. I don't understand why we don't have an emergency budget or some dollars put aside, I would

suspect, in addition to the sustainability fund and in addition to the heritage trust fund because I think we can guarantee that in a province this busy, in a province that has not only the labour side in terms of high-risk labour costs – we never know what's going to go on, and usually there is some kind of an emergency. We have no idea what it may be, but to put money aside to be able to meet it when it does come I think would be wise planning.

In Housing and Urban Affairs there was \$3,488,000 in unspent funds – \$3,488,000 in unspent funds. Now, which programs did not spend their total budget? I find that amazing. I believe the same thing happened in the department for the PDD funds. I think there was \$10 million that wasn't spent. I can understand, perhaps, taking that money back. But who suffered as a result of not spending these dollars? They were budgeted to be spent in a particular way, and the question I think is quite clear: why weren't they spent? If that money was clawed back and put back into the budget, then it certainly should look better for the next year, and they wouldn't have to necessarily require all of these supplementary accounts that they've been asking for, all of these extra dollars.

Under Municipal Affairs they were asking for more supplemental funds. Again unspent funds and not necessarily explained where that money went when they found out that it wasn't spent. Some of that money was for H1N1. Absolutely. Totally necessary. But why didn't we have emergency fund money put aside?

One of the questions that I would ask under Municipal Affairs – there was a report that came out. I think it was called the heat intensity residential fire report, and it was as of 2007. There were some recommendations in there, some of which I think should be under further discussion. I also believe that developers should be at the table when this discussion takes place because most of it has to do with the construction side.

In fact, some of the statistics were that many of these fires, a goodly portion of these fires, were based on carelessness: smoking in your homes, barbecues on your back porches, or arson on construction sites. I think that is what I've heard from the other side many times: education, education, education. I'm not altogether sure that those kinds of preventive things actually should be legislated, but it would appear that the recommendations coming out of that particular report are.

As I've mentioned, I think one of the most important things is that the developers be at the table because they are the ones who are going to incur the extra cost as a result of what I think upon reading that report was just a little bit, perhaps, over the top in terms of regulations. I know this government often speaks about not having a lot of regulations, having the freedom to go forward, having the entrepreneurial spirit that they always speak about, and now we're going to have a competitiveness bill to talk about. Well, I don't think that when you have all of these regulations made by people who aren't in the industry that is actually going to suffer the consequences of them, these recommendations shouldn't be – in my mind, go back to the table and have the developers there with them. One of the recommendations was to have the municipalities and the developers involved, but that was a recommendation going ahead. I would like to see that particular discussion happen before the recommendations go forward for any kind of legislation to be made around them.

Mr. Chair, I believe that my colleague from Calgary-Varsity spoke very well to Education.

Again, nonbudgetary disbursements. I know that you talk about the sustainability fund a lot, and I know it's always nice to have that little cushion behind you, but I think that when you look at family budgets, there is not only the cushion for saving; there's also the cushion for maintenance of the homes, if they happen to have a

home, and there's always that little bit extra put aside for emergencies. This is what I would like to see this government do because we always will have something that is over and above what we could possibly imagine when we're putting that budget together.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be able to rise and join in debate on Bill 5. This is a bill where the government is seeking from this Legislature permission to spend roughly another billion dollars. I think the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood made the point, when he was talking about this issue a couple of days ago, that it seems that we have a real problem with our budgeting process in that it really doesn't seem to be a real thing anymore. We have a budget presented to us, and we have a bunch of sort of pretend cuts made in that budget or pretend savings or whatever they are, and then we herald to all corners of the province our ability to either balance the budget or come closer to balancing the budget than we'd expected, whatever the case may be. Then we come back here eight months later, and we ask for more money because, in fact, we never really meant it. We never really meant that we were only going to spend that much money.

Now, of course, as you know, I'm not a big advocate of cuts. That's not what I'm here for, but I do think that we need to be able to have an honest conversation with Albertans about what it is that we're spending and what it is that we're going to have to spend. It seems to me that we have gotten into the habit of strategically underestimating certain expenditures throughout the budget in order to try and paint a better picture at a time when the government feels its under a great deal of political pressure to bring in a more balanced budget. It seems to me that we've done this in a number of different areas.

Of course, just to state at the outset, there are some areas that are less predictable, and that's what we should be here for. We should be spending this time coming back to talk about those expenditures which arose which were simply not predictable. The H1N1 is a perfect example of that kind of thing. That had a number of additional costs attached to it, and no one could have necessarily predicted that. That's what supplemental estimates should be about.

3:30

We shouldn't be coming here to talk about things that anybody could have seen coming 12 or 13 months ago. Of course, the perfect example of that is the Employment and Immigration budget. Last year the government suggested that it was going to be able to maintain the level of funding that it had had previously in place for income support, and everybody knew that the unemployment rate was increasing dramatically. Everyone knew that we were going into a recession. Everyone knew that there were going to be significant changes. So, no big surprise, here we are, you know, 10 months later from when the budget was passed asking for an additional \$130 million for income supports, or \$150 million when you include the health benefits. We all knew that that was going to happen.

Of course, now we're going into this current budget, and we're pretending that that number is going to actually come down. We have no reason to believe that because what we've seen is that caseloads are going up very, very dramatically. There's no reason to believe that they will stop going up, and there's certainly no reason to believe that they're going to come down. Yet the government is very intentionally underbudgeting in that area. So it's very frustrating for us to be here having to deal with these because these are not unpredictable expenditures.

Now, another thing that I wanted to sort of put on the record is: why do we have this unpredictable form of budgeting? Because the government wants to be able to say: "Oh, look at us. Look at us. We've come relatively close to balancing the budget." My position on this is that, you know, if you want to do that, instead of making up fantasy budgets where we have fantasy line items and fantasy cost-reduction plans, why don't we look at the revenue side of the formula? Why don't we acknowledge the fact that by going to the flat tax eight or nine years ago, we are effectively shortchanging this budget this year by roughly \$5 billion? Why don't we look at that?

There are ways to bring this budget into balance. There were ways for this government last year to make this budget balanced, but they refused to look at them. We leave billions and billions of dollars on the table in this province primarily for high-income Albertans. It is a myth that low- and middle-income Albertans pay the least amount of tax in the country, a complete myth, but it is true that high-income Albertans pay the least amount of tax.

At a time when we're all collectively coming together and acknowledging that we're in a recession and we all need to chip in and pull up our socks and help out and roll up our sleeves and all those great things, it would seem to me that maybe what we might start doing is saying to those higher income Albertans that it might be more helpful for them to start paying just a portion of that \$5 billion that we've been leaving on the table year after year after year. I would suggest that that's a much better way to balance the budget rather than underestimating chronically, repeatedly, predictably, systemically the expenditures that we need to make.

Now, the other key area in these supplemental expenditures that the government is seeking, of course, relates to health. The government has done quite a grand job of patting itself on the back over the course of the last two or three weeks because they've increased spending in health both going forward as well as in the current year in relation to both the Alberta Health Services deficit for the year '09-10 and also for their so-called surge funding.

I think a number of people, of course, raised the concern that I will mirror, that I'm very concerned about this money being thrown out the window at private deliverers of health care because I believe without qualification that that is the more expensive route to take to addressing that problem and, again, not wise money management.

There's another piece about the money management discussion that I think needs to be addressed. We're throwing money at the health care system, not that much ultimately because if you factor in inflation, population increase, the predictable increases of an aging population, in fact we are probably even with the five-year plan, underfunding health care, but at least we're not grabbing a whole bunch of money and pulling it out. Unfortunately, what we are doing is that we're grabbing a whole bunch of money and pulling it out of other areas: family and children services, income supports for people with low income, training for people with low incomes who are on income support, housing. We're cutting back on our housing expenditures. We're cutting back in all these areas.

If anyone spends even a little bit of time talking about health care, you know full well that the research is pretty unequivocal, that what you need to do is look at that issue more globally, and you need to look at the whole social determinants of health. You need to understand that until you ensure every Albertan has a roof over their head and enough money to put food on the table for themselves and for their children, you are going to have more expense in the health care system. You're going to have expense in the health care system that's going to come back year over year over year over year as people who are unable to access secure housing and unable to access any kind of consistent nutritional support will repeatedly end up going to the health care system, where ultimately the care for them costs the taxpayer much, much more than it would have otherwise.

Again, we're being asked to approve additional money for the health care system, yet unfortunately we're doing this in the context of a budget that goes forward where we're going to cut from those other areas which would ensure on a preventative basis that we're having fewer people enter into the health care system. It's that kind of silo-based budgeting and that failure to look at the bigger picture and that failure to understand the importance of prevention that is resulting, ultimately, in the need for us to spend more money in this area, more than we need to. That's a real concern for us with respect to that issue.

Finally, of course, we've mentioned before that this request for extra money also deals with the increase in students seeking student loan assistance in order to frantically try and access our postsecondary education. Again, what this really is is an opportunity for the government to shift debt load onto individual Alberta citizens. As I've said many other times in the House, we are looking at moving Alberta back to a place where we become the most expensive place in the country for our citizens to access postsecondary education, and our answer to that problem is to simply invite those students to take on more debt. Again, this is not a big picture analysis. This is not a long-term analysis. This is not any kind of planning that is anything other than reactive to the most recent poll and the six-month planning cycle.

I have to say that I understand that it is frustrating sometimes for governments who have to get re-elected to make hard decisions in advance of challenges that won't be resolved for two or three years down the road. But, good Lord, you know, a government like this, that's been in power for this long: instead of the way in which we see arrogance demonstrated in other ways, we'd think that they would be able to actually plan outside of a polling cycle or an election cycle and actually have some good institutional sort of infrastructures in place. Instead, we're right back in a situation where this government is managing our budget as though they're six months away from an election and they're on the verge of losing, which they may be this time. But it's very frustrating to see the lack of foresight which this bill demonstrates to the rest of us in the Assembly.

With those comments, I will complete my commentary on this bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the committee format and the opportunity to speak more than once. Under the what's missing category I want to bring up Children and Youth Services. Children and Youth Services received a \$27 million cut in their operational programming under the protection for children in care and custody area, and that's a major concern of mine. We're seeing jobs frozen, we're seeing caseloads increasing, and there was nothing in supplementary supply to ease that circumstance.

3:40

This past year we saw three children being charged for murder. We saw three children being killed while in custody. Unless there is oversight and support, more children are going to either go astray or be harmed within the custody of the province. The numbers of children that are being taken into custody in this province considerably outweigh those of other provinces, so if we're going to take them into care, then the least we can do is provide care for them.

It concerns me that the number of hours of in-home support are part of that \$27 million cut, that trying to keep kids within their homes rather than putting them into foster care or fast-tracking foster

care to adopt is not being supported within the budget. The business, as the hon. Member from Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out, of being proactive in your investments is extremely important. Whether it's children or disabled individuals in PDD, the support we provide up front saves considerable support in terms of hospitalization, in terms of institutionalization. Most families, with a degree of support, can manage their loved ones, but they need that extra support.

Going back to Culture and Community Spirit, I had the privilege of attending with my wife Theatre Calgary's production of *Beyond Eden*, which is part of the Cultural Olympiad. The funding for that type of production, which was absolutely incredible, is extremely important. Also, the funding, for example, for M. Grand-Maître, who is the artistic director for the ballet, whose talent we've seen with the opening of the Olympic Games: those kinds of projects need ongoing funding. This was a special Alberta showcase not only for athletic talent, but Grand-Maître, witnessed by millions around the world, indicated to the world the kinds of artistic talent that this province possesses. We need to be promoting that.

This supplementary supply budget, after a fashion, is a Band-Aid. There's no doubt about it. Greater planning and the potential for recognizing liabilities and the need for increased care as the population ages and experiences greater need has to be built into the main budgets. But when, for whatever reason, it escapes the main budget preparation, then the sup supply is kind of the backup parachute, and unfortunately this parachute will not get us safely down and through this recession.

Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to speak again. The money that we invest up front produces terrific return.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, I want to say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre that I take her constructive criticism very seriously. I don't know why we won't ask for more information on questions. I can assure you that when there are supplementary estimates coming back in, if I can't understand what it means in there, then we'll send it back and get the information there. I agree. It could have been better explained. I will commit to her that we'll do that.

The Chair: Any other members wish to speak on the bill?
Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report the bill.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports Bill 5.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act

[Adjourned debate February 23: Mrs. Jablonski]

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My initial reaction to this bill was not very kind towards the government because . . . [interjections] Well, I'm always struck by how this government feels that it needs to pass legislation to provide conditions that many would expect they would do as a matter of course. So when I have a government that needs to pass a Fiscal Responsibility Act to keep itself from going into debt, I have to shake my head and laugh. Well, duh. Governments are supposed to manage their resources responsibly. Why did this government feel that it needed to pass an act of legislation to keep itself in line? That always struck me as really odd. Well, I guess history proved them right and me wrong. They did need a piece of legislation to try and keep them under control. It didn't work very well.

I remember when the – surely he's not the federal Finance minister, but maybe he is – former Member for Red Deer-North, who was then our Treasurer, brought in . . .

Mr. Chase: Stockwell Day.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah.

It was called something around fiscal administration or responsibility. I mean, that's what it was supposed to do, keep them from running up a deficit. Yet that bill came back every single year for an amendment to adjust everything so whatever they decided to do that year would still be legal, but they'd already done it, so this was being passed, you know, after the fact. I thought: well, that makes a mockery of the whole process. You say you need this legislation to keep yourself in line, and then you're going to go outside of the lines of it, and then you've got to hurriedly change the boundaries of it so that after the fact you can say that you didn't actually contravene your own act. It's a level of public spin that I think brings all of us into question by the population. They look at us and go: "What the heck are you guys doing? It doesn't make any sense." Frankly, I agree.

When I heard that the government had brought forward an act called the Competitiveness Act, I had exactly the same reaction. I rolled my eyes heavenward and went: oh, here we go again. Then I read through the act and thought: you have got to be kidding me. This is the Premier's flagship bill? This is what we're going to put forward as the big news from the 2010 legislative sitting? That's it? Guys, it's three pages long. It's just the tiniest bit short on substance if you know what I mean. And is it actually going to, you know, do anything? Well, no. They're going to form a committee.

3:50

Dr. Brown: Big things come in small packages.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, but there's some substance and some value to the small packages, and that's not what I'm seeing in here.

It actually establishes a board or a committee to go and look at this stuff. So all this talk, all this hype about, you know, how competitive we are, and what are we going to do? We're going to establish a board or something to come up with whatever this is.

I've had a couple of weeks since this was introduced to actually think about this, and I have two reactions to it. I was reading the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, and he has brought forward a really interesting perspective that in its most basic elements I agree with. I think the basis of the disagreements that I often end up having with members of the government is that I don't think that the only role of government is to enable the private sector to make money.

I think there are roles for the government around protection, whether that's protection of the vulnerable or protection of Albertans in a consumer protection way, which is why I brought forward things like the concerns I was raising about Ticketmaster. It's why I brought forward concerns around payday loans. It's why I brought forward concerns around heat metering. Those were all consumer protection issues, in essence, so obviously that's deeply important to me.

I am concerned that we continue to think of our constituents, of our citizens as clients, as taxpayers, and that's the only role that this government seems to be willing to assign people. You're either a client, i.e. a recipient of services, or you're a taxpayer. But this government doesn't seem to be willing to look upon the people who live in our province as constituents, as citizens, people who have more in their lives than the agenda that the government puts forward. So I want to say that I do agree with the intent of what the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has said.

The other thing that occurred to me as I thought about this act was: what competitiveness? What competitiveness are you talking about? We focus so much on the oil and gas sector in this province. I've never worked in the oil and gas sector, and I've never worked in support services for the oil and gas sector. I have spent my working career in public service and in the NGO sector, which is a significant sector in Alberta, but we all tend to not want to think about that for some reason.

I was struck by a couple of things I've been looking into recently in which Alberta has an opportunity. It's laid in front of them how they could be more competitive – in other words, get more business for the benefit of Alberta citizens – and they choose not to take advantage of it. That perplexes me. I'm going to focus in on one and give you a really specific example to think about because Alberta is more than oil and gas. Let me say right off: don't bother bashing me that I'm not appreciative of the oil and gas sector because I am. I like that money. I like that money because it builds things like art galleries. It funds our schools. It makes a lot of things possible for us. It makes us a wealthy, wealthy province. I'm not going to bash them. I understand where that money is coming from. I want a better balance with environmental protection, and I also won't back off on saying that stuff. But that's not the only thing that can be used in this province to be competitive.

I want to talk about the film sector. Now, this is low-hanging fruit, guys. This is easy. We have a film sector in Alberta. It's easy to sell Alberta's natural beauty. You may not be aware, but we have very unique light in Alberta that shows up on film stock. It's why people like to come and shoot films here. Our big sky country and literally the quality of the light makes films look really good. So it's low-hanging fruit. To get people to come here is not hard, right? We have a certain amount of natural resource that they want to take advantage of. We have trained people. Both SAIT and NAIT train people to work in film and television production. We have unions who willingly take those students from SAIT and NAIT and work

with them and have programs that work those students into the actual production in film and television. Then we have a regulatory regime which is so ass-backwards that we are losing competition. [interjections] I apologize for the use of that language, but it was the most descriptive in two short words that I could come up with. Asinine, okay? All right, I'll change the language.

So what have we done here in Alberta? We used to have the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation, which actually developed scripts and worked with our producers and our screenwriters and our technical people to move our film industry along. This government in all of its wisdom disbanded that in 1994. Then we had nothing, and our film production dropped like a rock. Everybody went to B.C., Saskatchewan, anywhere but here because we had nothing, no incentives to offer them.

Then with much lobbying from the film industry, we got the then Treasurer to come up with the three streams scheme, that is actually still in use now, in which stream 1 offered a 25 per cent credit or payback on money that was spent in Alberta as long as you met certain criteria. This stream 1 is basically Alberta production. It has to have key individuals and a lot of key individuals involved in the production, so it was really meant to be Alberta centred and use a lot of Alberta technicians and artisans and craftspeople and artistic people in the production.

Then we had stream 2. It was meant to attract big Hollywood films in from other places, but we still wanted them to train our people. You can see how old this is, right? We don't really need to train our people anymore; we've got lots of trained people. We're still running with that old system of: well, we need other people to come in so we can train our people so they can be good enough to, you know, have their own film industry. But the truth of the matter is that we are going to have a hybrid film industry here. We are going to have smaller, low-budget local productions that have a lot of people involved. We also want to attract the honking big Hollywood films to come here and shoot because in order to get credits, they are also part of this streaming, but the credits that they're being offered are significantly lower than what they can get in other places.

So we are losing out to B.C., to Saskatchewan, to New Mexico, even to the Maritimes. I am so frustrated with that, Mr. Speaker. This is so easy to be competitive if that's what is important. And you know who gets the work? Albertans, citizens, constituents. They get to work at home. And for those of you in the oil sector, you understand all too well what it means to not be able to work at home. It's the same thing in the film sector. How do you think our artisans and technicians, our directors, our writers, our actors feel about always having to go somewhere else to work? To be able to come home, to be able to earn a paycheque here in Alberta, to be able to work here at home, and to be able to contribute – these are good people. They volunteer in their communities. They coach baseball teams. They're involved in their communities.

So it's about the citizens that are here, and that money stays here. This is not about making megabucks for some corporation that has its headquarters in Houston or Chicago or New York. This is about Albertans and our ability to be able to be good citizens and to earn a decent living here through a sector that we know well.

The stream 3 that I was talking about. The first stream was all Alberta, the second stream was kind of a hybrid, and stream 3 was a brokerage stream. It was meant to address a problem that cropped up in which a big Hollywood film could come in, and if they had certain people and they were willing to kind of give up half of their control of the film, then they could get a better percentage back. But you know what? That just doesn't work anymore. You're not going to end up with Disney or Pixar coming in here and going, "Oh, yeah,

sure. I'll give up half of my points in a film or half of my ownership of a film so that I can get a couple of percentage points more on a film credit system that they have in Alberta." It's not going to happen. I mean, guys, be realistic here. It's not working, and there are way better deals to be had elsewhere.

4:00

Let me talk to you about B.C. B.C. just raised its tax credit – it works on a tax credit program – from 25 per cent of a tax credit to 33 per cent of a tax credit. You think that doesn't matter? If you were going to do a film, would you be in Alberta, where you were getting at best somewhere in the 20 to 25 per cent range, or would you go to B.C. for 33 per cent? Again, the answer is: well, duh. Where are our Albertans going to get work? They're not going to get that work that they could have had here.

We need to have stream 2 and stream 3 combined, and that could be done by the minister tomorrow if he wanted to. The other thing is that, really, you need to consider moving to a tax credit model. For the minister to be talking to producers and to the head of the CBC, based in Ontario, does not help us here. Frankly, those people are not producing here in a lot of cases, or they're making demands that just don't work for us. We should be able to be competitive here. B.C. right now is the third largest production centre in America. We used to be right behind them, and now we're way behind them.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm very interested in the film possibilities. As the hon. member mentioned, not only do we have terrific backdrops – mountains, prairies – we produce more than westerns in Alberta. I'm just wondering if the hon. member could talk about some of the homegrown talent and the education opportunities for theatre and the arts in this province, some of the potential that we're not necessarily realizing.

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

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Thank you. I do have something for that. I guess it was last week I actually tabled this letter, so it's in the sessional papers. This was someone that contacted me, and they were very frustrated with what's happening. Here's their story. This is Dean Goodine, and he started working in the Alberta industry in 1986 after attending SAIT. He worked on *Unforgiven*, *Legends of the Fall*, and was the property master on *Jesse James*, all films shot here in Alberta which you would all be familiar with. His wife is an Alberta-born Academy Award nominee for *Unforgiven* as a set decorator, Janice Blackie-Goodine. Now, Janice also won a Genie award for set decorating *Passchendaele*, again partly filmed here in Alberta.

They have trained 75 per cent of the props and set people in Alberta. They've been tireless spokespeople for the industry. Here's the twist. Where do they live? They now live in Vancouver, and that's where he was writing to me from. He is working with another ex-Edmontonian, Grace Gilroy, and their crew is mostly Albertans living there. So here we have people we've trained, given experience to, and they can't work here in Alberta.

Here's another bit that I want to add to that about benefits to Alberta. When Janice was working on *Unforgiven*, she went to Nanton to look for some set decoration. They were in an antique store, and she and her crew were piling all of this stuff they wanted

to buy in the middle of the store, and the owner said, "What are you doing?" She explained that she needed all of these antiques for a movie. He said, "Well, how are you going to pay?" And she said, "Cash." That's how they work. The owner started to cry because that was the day he was going to go out of business. By walking in there and buying all of the sets and the antiques that she needed to dress the set, she was able – at 11 o'clock that Tuesday morning they paid over \$20,000 in cash to that antique business owner, and he stayed in business until he finally retired many, many years later. So there's a direct benefit. A true story of how the big film industry can very much benefit Alberta artists and Alberta businesses.

Thank you for the question.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. You mentioned the natural light, the geographic splendour of this province. Could you comment a little bit about the need for sound studios and production facilities in this province and why we should be encouraging that homegrown production?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. That's a tougher issue. We do have a sound studio that was built here by the late Charles Allard, and it's now being privately run. This is a business that moves ahead fast. If any of you could have thought 20 years ago that you'd be watching a feature film like *Up*, that was entirely animated, you can see how fast this industry moves forward on technology. In fact, a number of people say that that space in Edmonton as a sound stage will only do small commercials, and it's not big enough to shoot films. In Calgary we actually don't have a big enough sound studio at all, which is part of what the minister was working on and why I was interested in how that is progressing because it's been something that we've needed.

We could get more postproduction work done and more of the actual big Hollywood films shot here with all the extra work that comes with it: the catering and the wranglers and the scene shops and the carpenters and the businesses, the lighting shops that sell equipment to them. All of that money that comes from the big Hollywood productions can stay here in Alberta, and more of it could stay in Alberta if we had a sound studio that they could work with. We don't, so they pack up, and they go back to L.A., or they go back to the other cities that actually have those large sound stages. It's certainly something that's an investment for us. It would certainly generate a lot more money to stay here.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get to say a few words today about Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I want to just comment on the discussion that's just happened regarding the film industry. Having a son who's in the film industry, now living and learning in Toronto but is intent on moving back, I want to say that he'll probably not appreciate my talking about his life. He also has a great foundation in Alberta, learning film in Alberta and being a recipient of support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. So our government is doing a lot of good things to support these people, but we sure like to get them back.

I've listened with great interest to the many and diverse perspectives that have been presented in terms of Bill 1. It's interesting how we can have such a variety of views about this bill. You know, some have spoken about the traditional significance of a Bill 1, how it signals government's intentions. Others have been critical about the bill being shallow or too focused on negative things like competition and so on. So I want to offer my own perspective here.

First of all, the question of: is it even desirable to be so focused on competition? It is kind of appropriate, maybe, to talk about that at a time when the Olympics are on in the context of the Olympics. Any competition requires at least two participants, and essentially what it is is a comparison of how you're doing measured against somebody else. You know, some who have commented feel as though that maybe could be a negative thing, but I'd point out that very often those who comment on how our government is doing, what we're up to, do point out how we compare, I suppose how we are competing with what's happening in other jurisdictions. I welcome those comparisons. I think it's healthy, and I think it's a good idea. One has to be somewhat careful, though, about comparisons because there are always many variables, and those have to be taken into account so that we are comparing apples to apples.

Another good thing about comparisons is that it forces us to look at ourselves, to self-assess. Even in the Olympics context people try to achieve their personal best, so it's a good thing for us to look at how we're doing, assess ourselves, see if we are achieving our personal best. Imagine an Olympics where that's all people did, tried to achieve their personal best and didn't ever compare how they were doing against what others are doing.

4:10

Now, Alberta hasn't been immune to the downturn in the global economy. We've been bruised a little bit, and as has been mentioned many times in this Assembly, we're vulnerable to big swings in revenues and so on, but as we recover from what many say is the worst recession since the 1930s, I think we're in pretty good shape compared to other jurisdictions. In fact, I would suggest that, probably, most jurisdictions in North America would be very happy to trade places with us in terms of where we sit financially. We've got \$17 billion in a sustainability fund, a savings account which we can use to protect programs because of these swings. I would suggest that that demonstrates some good foresight and some good planning.

Another thing I just want to comment on a little bit, again in terms of interpretation of what this act is about, is the scope of the act. I think there is a danger in taking a very narrow focus, focusing only on a narrow type of competition and thinking that it relates only to industry or even to specific industries such as the oil and gas industry. When you look at the wording of this legislation, I think it's much broader than that, and I think the intention is that it be much broader than that. I just picked out a few words and a few phrases from the bill, and I just want to read them, things like "quality of life," "innovation," "technology," "environment," "alignment of activities across government," "strengthening partnerships." Those things speak to me of a much broader approach than just a narrow focus on competition in that negative sense.

We have to recognize that coming out of this recession, the global economy isn't going to be the same. We're going to have to be adaptable. We need to pursue different strategies, and there are all kinds of ways we can do that, but just to throw out a couple, and it's been mentioned a number of times in this House: regulatory burden. Now that's something that certainly touches industry, and we want to reduce regulatory burden wherever we can. Some steps have been taken to achieve some efficiencies. I think of something like BizPaL, which is a single portal for industry to access government agencies and programs and so on.

But, again, it's not just about industry. I think about my constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. If you were to talk to my staff there, they would talk about all of the phone calls they get relating to employment issues, housing issues, long-term care issues, health care issues, and so on. Sometimes just manoeuvring through that

system and dealing with the system can be very intimidating. There are efficiencies that we should be trying to achieve so that it's more user-friendly. So we're not just talking about user-friendliness for industry; we're talking about user-friendliness for all Albertans.

Now, the notion of a competitive provincial economy is centred on our ability to attract new people, new businesses, new innovation and technology, the next generation of entrepreneurs, and generally to make Alberta user-friendly for all of those. As we would all know in here, we can sometimes get a little bit preoccupied with the issue of the day, the pressure of the moment, and maybe we don't always have the kind of time that we would like to have to take the long view, to get our eyes off the ground and look to the horizon. That's why I really appreciate this bill, and that's why I would say that the Premier has shown great foresight, vision, and leadership in presenting this bill as Bill 1, because it sends that message that we have to look ahead.

I think it's been mentioned here in earlier debate that doing this kind of thing is not a one-off. It's a work in progress. It's the type of thing that has to be continually worked on, an ongoing process in order to stay ahead of the curve. We have to be adaptable to changes that are coming.

For all of those reasons I very much support this bill, and I encourage all of my colleagues to support it as well. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I sincerely appreciate your reflections and also the personal connection to the arts and film industry. Being a father as well as a grandfather, I can relate very directly. You mentioned, and I agree, that Alberta is much better prepared to weather the recession effects, and you referenced the \$17 billion sustainability fund. I'm just wondering if you have any insight or knowledge of how much of the 17 billion original dollars remain, if you have any sense of what's left so that we can hopefully continue to use it as a buffer over the next two years.

Mr. Olson: Well, I will try to answer that question. But first I'd like to say that regarding the arts, you've given me a great opportunity to promote a film festival in Camrose this weekend. Check out www.nordlysfestival.com. Nordlys is Norwegian for northern lights.

The sustainability fund. You know, obviously that fund has been talked about a lot. In a perfect world we'd never have to use it, but it's not a perfect world. It's there to protect us in downturns. There is no desire within our caucus to blow that wad in one year or even two or three years.

I'm going on memory here now, and I'm standing straight across from the minister of finance. I think the number was in the \$3 billion range. You know, that's a moving number, too, just as revenues change. I can remember my first summer in government: we were talking about an \$8 billion surplus, and within eight months we were talking about deficits. So that's an example of the volatility. It's a moving number, but it's there, and there would be few, if any, other jurisdictions that have that kind of protection.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate that qualification, and I'm very glad the minister of finance is here to echo that number. For any Albertans interested, if my math is correct, then we have approximately \$14 billion left in the sustainability fund so that we continue to provide a buffer.

The other question I have – and I'm not getting into wordsmithing or semantics, but one of the things you mentioned in the Alberta Competitiveness Act was that when we compete against someone else, we also have an opportunity for self-reflection, for trying to achieve our personal best. I wondered about the notion of, instead of an Alberta competitive act, if we had an Alberta collaboration act, where we worked to accomplish the best from within the province with the talents we have, with interministerial co-operativeness, consultation with Albertans, and using that same sort of collaboration aspect such as the TILMA agreement, if we then branched out to the other western provinces. So instead of the competitive, so to speak, where it suggests win and loss, we should be looking more at a collaborative process. Or is that collaboration built into this competition act as you see it?

4:20

Mr. Olson: Well, I would say that, I suppose, there can be some subjective interpretations of what some of these words mean, but for me competitiveness does not preclude collaboration. I think there are words such as partnership embodied in the legislation: partnership, government working together, and so on. So I don't think that the two have to be mutually exclusive.

The Deputy Speaker: We're back to the bill. Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, your turn.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak on the bill. When it was first introduced, I saw the value of an act that would cut through red tape, but I was concerned about the manner in which this cutting was proposed. In essence, what this bill allows for is the establishment of a board or a committee with a rather loose mandate of increasing competitiveness. The underlying principle behind the bill is to increase collaboration between government, business, and industry, but there are very few specifics, and therefore it's difficult to determine what, if any, impact there may be. I talked about the need for rules of the game, so to speak, so that we could head in the direction we wish to go and then have some sort of system of evaluation to know if we got there.

The government's news release on this bill states that throughout the next year benchmarks and goals will be established. Again, this is part of my concern: sort of putting the cart before the horse. Why don't we have the benchmarks? Why don't we have the goals pre-established? As a teacher I always had objectives for my students. When we went into a lesson, I had behavioural objectives where I could say that after this particular lesson is completed, this individual will be able to demonstrate their knowledge by doing this, this, and this in a very practical sense. Then I had overall general objectives, where I expected a larger learning than just specific skills to take place.

There's no reference to when completion or action on these benchmarks and goals will take place nor is there any reference to specific action that will be taken now. I'd like to think that every student I had was self-motivated, and they were an empty vessel waiting for me to introduce information to them that they would just automatically take in. But without goals or expectations, without report cards, if I never marked their assignments and just came up with a grade at the end of the year, they wouldn't have kept on doing their assignments. What would the grade mean if there was no feedback during the process?

The only reference to anything specific both in the bill and in the news release is to the government's oil and gas competitiveness review and the western economic partnership between B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan. We're still waiting for that oil and gas competi-

tiveness review, and possibly that'll spell out the types of benchmarks that could be applied to other areas of our economic well-being.

Establishing benchmarks, reporting explicitly through annual reports, collaborating across ministries and with key players in industry are all important and positive steps towards improving Alberta's competitiveness. But this bill does not take any real action towards making these things happen. There are no details, no time frame, no end goal other than elusive phrases: increase competitiveness.

We have a concept, we have a destination, but we don't have a map. We don't have a plan for arriving at that destination. All this bill does is legislate an idea. Here we have a philosophy; let's turn it into a piece of legislation.

Also, there is a little bit of overlap in the sense that the government already has a Regulatory Review Secretariat with the following mandate:

The goal of regulatory reform is to identify opportunities to reduce and simplify the regulatory burden of government on the people and businesses of Alberta. Supporting the development of good regulation creates the conditions for business to thrive and enhance productivity towards sustainable prosperity. Alberta's regulatory reform places stakeholders at the center of its regulatory activity to uphold . . .

I'm not going to go on, but the point is that that's already there. If we're going to take it beyond sort of motherhood-type statements, then we have to create the rules. We have to create the evaluatory instruments to let us know: are we getting closer to achieving the type of competitiveness that we're looking for? Are we eliminating red tape? Can we say that we've accomplished this, this, and that, and therefore it's easier to get a permit to do whatever it is, whether it's building, exploration for oil and gas, and so on?

The Regulatory Review Secretariat seems to be more concentrated on the, quotes, red tape burden of compliance requirements and regulations whereas the guiding principle behind Bill 1 is more about collaboration. I talked a little bit about this in terms of co-operation, competition, and collaboration, yet both have very similar mandates and ultimately have the same end goal of allowing for productivity, competitiveness, and sustainable prosperity.

Eliminating red tape is not the only step necessary to increase competitiveness. It is an important first step. Other provinces such as B.C. and Newfoundland have set percentage reduction goals and have produced results. In other words, they have said: "By such and such a time we'll have achieved this. We can check it off. We can say we've been successful." We don't have those benchmarks in this bill. Alberta has been reviewing regulatory burdens for over 10 years now and has yet to produce the reductions in red tape that other provinces have. The CFIB argues that Alberta has actually increased its regulatory burden in that time frame. In terms of the regulatory burden I believe we're on our sixth attempt at getting the royalty regime correct.

Also, the government already has a Premier's economic advisory committee, a Regulatory Review Secretariat, an oil and gas competitiveness review that we're still waiting to see, a western economic partnership with B.C. and Saskatchewan, and a Canada-Alberta western partnership. How many more committees and partnerships do we need? Why can't the goals of Bill 1 be carried out by one of these other arrangements? Why is the government seemingly afraid to take definitive action as opposed to creating endless committees with endless discussions and, unfortunately, no resolution?

This is the kind of initiative that the premise of this bill is intended to eliminate. The government is actually creating more legislation and more regulations with this bill. This makes me flash back to the ministry affectionately known as RAGE, restructuring and government efficiency, that was the first platform to stardom for the hon.

Minister of Transportation. Fortunately, he survived the elimination of that questionable ministry, but this bill sort of suggests that we're trying to bring back to life the idea of restructuring and government efficiency. It didn't work within the ministry, and it has yet to demonstrate any workability in this bill.

Ultimately, this bill is meaningless. The intention behind the bill is something that is laudable and necessary, but the bill itself is hollow. There are absolutely no specifics in the bill, and it seems unusual that this act is being done through legislation. Why are we mandating another committee to do the role of government? Why, for example, doesn't the Premier set up a specific task force with a particular budget, with a particular timeline? He's been great at providing individual ministries with assignments. Why couldn't this have been dealt with under a particular ministry with a particular mandate?

4:30

Some of the questions that arise. Which industries is this bill targeting? How exactly will this bill improve competitiveness? What kind of competitiveness are we talking about here? What's the red tape that's getting in the way, so that we can eliminate it? Are we primarily dealing with the oil and gas industry, a key industry to our prosperity, beyond a doubt? If we could solve the oil and gas dilemma, then possibly we could apply the same logic to the other ministries, but we don't have that structurally strong foundation with regulations and rules to achieve that competitiveness that we're trying for. By creating a competitive environment for small business, by reducing red tape – I would assume that's one of the goals. Diversifying the economy in general: we have been fortunate by the God-given nonrenewable resources in this province, but unless we diversify our economy and get off our dependence on this globally determined nonrenewable resource value, we're going to continue to ride the roller coaster of bust and boom. What is our end goal? What is the time frame for us to reach this goal?

There are more questions than there are answers. I'm hoping that the government will be able to provide examples of how we're going to get there because at this point everything is set out that at some point in the future we'll somehow come up with benchmarks, we'll somehow have a report card, we'll somehow be able to evaluate how far we've come, but other than the goal of improving our competitiveness, which is a very broad-based goal, it's not spelled out, as I say, how we're going to get there.

I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker. I hope that the people who designed the bill and have a sense of where they want to arrive at can assure me and Albertans that there is a direction, there is a focus, there is a set of regulations, there is an evaluation so that we know that we'll have gone so far down the line towards improving our competitiveness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you. It was pretty nice to hear this hon. member sound very positive about this bill. I take it that he's supporting the bill. I just thought I'd ask him: is that an outright support of the bill?

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Possibly, like the UN, we need to set up a translation system here. I don't know. What I said is that I'm supportive of the intent of the bill, but unless you have the mechan-

ics to accomplish the intent, unless you spell out the rules, unless you set out how you're going to evaluate – evaluation has been a big part of my life for 34 years as a teacher. I'm very proud of that background. On a daily basis I evaluated my kids, and as such they evaluated me. I marked their papers. I created exams. I reported on their progress in a variety of ways. I don't see those interim measures or long-term measures built into this particular competitiveness bill. If you don't know what the rules of the game are and what standards you have to achieve, then how do you progress? That was the concern that I was expressing, not with the intent, but how do we get there?

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill 1 today. I thought that I might take just a slightly different approach in the discussion on this bill. I want to accomplish two things in the time that I have. One, to have a look at the preamble that's in this bill. Oftentimes we overlook the preamble, and admittedly in some cases preambles are not designed to be an integral part of the bill. But I would suggest to you that in this particular case it would do us all a lot of good to have a look at the preamble and spend a little bit of time discussing it because the preamble, really, is the essence of this bill. The rest is really the operationalization. But I think that there's much to be gained by discussing the preamble.

The other thing that I want to spend a little bit of time talking about is the whole concept of regulatory streamlining and the reduction and avoidance of duplication. As the minister of a department that is one of the most recognizable regulators in the House, I think it's appropriate that I spend some time discussing how this bill may or may not affect the environment in particular and the way we do business in Alberta Environment specifically.

Mr. Speaker, let's just for a moment have a look at the preamble that's in the bill because I think it's worth spending a little bit of time. First of all: "Whereas Alberta's success is founded on the competitiveness and the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans." What more can be said? Every time that I have an opportunity to speak inside and outside of Alberta, particularly outside of Alberta, I make particular note of the fact that Alberta has a wealth of resources. Much of the reason that others look to Alberta as being a success is attributed to our natural resources, but the fact of the matter is that while we have abundant resources in this province, they have been developed not by the government, not by the federal government but, in fact, by the people, by Albertans, by the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans, by that spirit that all of us are so proud of here in Alberta.

The next preamble says, "Whereas competitiveness is core to the Government of Alberta's plan to position Alberta for sustained prosperity to provide a high quality of life for Albertans." Again, we're talking about how we frame competitiveness in the context of creating the base, creating the opportunities for us to have economic activity in this province, to have wealth creation in this province, but recognizing that while we have abundant resources, it takes more than just abundant resources to be successful.

Now, this is a critical one, Mr. Speaker, the next one: "Whereas global competition for access to markets and for investment capital, people and skills is ever increasing." That is critical. We're not just talking about the things that often get reflected upon when we talk about a competitiveness review. When we talk about reducing the amount of regulatory burden or when we talk about other kinds of

barriers that are put in place, the key here is that not only are we competing in a global market for investment; frankly, we're competing for skilled people. If we don't have an opportunity for those skilled people to come to Alberta, to bring their knowledge, to bring their entrepreneurial spirit, we are not going to be successful. A lot of that has to do with competitiveness, competitiveness from the perspective of ensuring that we do have a vibrant arts and cultural community to attract people here, ensuring that we have a school system that will continue to attract people here. That, too, is part of the competitiveness.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, I could not talk about what brings people here and not mention the environment. Certainly, people are attracted to Alberta because of the beauty that we have, the environment that all of us are so proud of and spend so much time and effort protecting and ensuring that it is here for our children and our grandchildren.

The next whereas clause says: "Whereas the Government of Alberta believes that the role of government is to create the conditions for competitiveness so that entrepreneurship, innovation and investment will generate benefits for Albertans." I won't spend a lot of time on that one. As a Conservative that one is almost self-evident. How many times have we heard people ask, you know: what is the government doing to create jobs? What is the government doing to do this or that? Mr. Speaker, I don't have to remind you, I'm sure, that it's not the government that creates jobs. It's entrepreneurs, it's small businesses, it's large businesses, it's people who have the faith to invest in our province that create the jobs. It's the role of government to create a level playing field, to create the opportunity for that investment to be successful. Let's never forget that it's not the responsibility of government to create the jobs. As soon as we try to convince ourselves that we the politicians, we the government create the jobs, the faster we'll defeat our intent to do just that.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the last whereas clause says, "Whereas better alignment of activities across Government to strengthen partnerships among Albertans, business, industry and Government will support the development of a shared strategy to increase Alberta's competitiveness." This is all about how are we going to not deal with issues in isolation but ensure that any kind of a plan that comes forward, an initiative that comes forward out of this bill takes into account the fact that there needs to be integration. There needs to be a reflection that an action taken on one front may have a negative or perhaps an unwarranted or unwanted reaction on another front. It's imperative that when we develop policies, we do so in the context of keeping that reality in mind. We can't make changes in isolation in one part of government and not expect that there won't be any unintended consequences, perhaps, in other areas of government or other parts of the economy.

Now, if I can, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just spend a few moments talking about what this means from the point of view of some of the comments that were in the Speech from the Throne and, I think, are by extension included in Bill 1. That is: how are we going to address the issue of protecting our precious environment but doing so at the same time as we remove unnecessary duplication, as we remove unnecessary burden on industry, on investment, on Albertans so that they can do what it is we want them to do, and that's create wealth and create jobs?

I want to give just a couple of quick examples of the kinds of things that we need to be aware of. When we do approvals in Alberta Environment, it's a very prolonged process where we have an industrial approval that is before our staff, and our staff are very diligent, do an outstanding job, in my opinion, of ensuring that they

cover off all of the possible concerns that might be in a particular industrial application.

It tends to be focused very much on the type of technology that's employed, on the emissions that may or may not be created as a result of the approval, Mr. Speaker, but frankly I think that there is a lot of duplication. In fact, I've had some discussion with some of the approval writers in the department, and even they will admit that for many approvals the first 50 to 60 pages could almost be photocopied from one to the next because they are virtually the same. The last 40 or 50 pages or in some cases maybe only 10 pages are critical because they deal with what is different about this particular application as opposed to a number of others. When we talk about eliminating unnecessary duplication, it's about ensuring that we don't spin our wheels, that we don't spend a lot of unnecessary talent and resources within Environment writing and rewriting our approvals in areas that are duplicative of many others in that same office.

The other side, I think, is equally important, and that's ensuring as a government, as the government of Alberta, not just Alberta Environment, that we're working together, that we're communicating, because many of the areas that Alberta Environment is responsible for regulating have overlap. We have overlap with the Energy Resources Conservation Board, the ERCB, and we have overlap with Sustainable Resource Development, SRD. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, there may be a very real probability that on any given day we might have three trucks – one from Alberta Environment, one from SRD, and one from the ERCB – all at the same site at the same time, yes, each doing something slightly different, but is it really necessary that all three be there? Are there ways that we can work together so that if there are issues that need to be dealt with by the ERCB and an Environment person is on-site, they can pass that information on?

Is there, Mr. Speaker, unnecessary duplication of reports to each of those organizations? Are we even sharing the information internally, or are we requiring the approval holder to send individual reports – one to ERCB, one to Environment, and one to SRD – when, in fact, it's all the government of Alberta? How are we expecting folks to do business here, recognizing that it's one government and at the same time ensuring that we're not in any way denigrating the very important role that each of those organizations plays?

So that's what this is all about, Mr. Speaker. It's not a simple matter of putting it in a bill and it will happen. What this bill accomplishes is that it creates the opportunity. In fact, I would suggest that it doesn't just create an opportunity. It creates a requirement for us in government to have a look at the way we regulate, how we protect the environment, at a myriad of other ways that we have organizations that are protecting the environment, protecting Albertans, and doing so very, very well, I might add. But have we actually taken the time to ensure that we do so from a co-ordinated approach? That from the head of a regulator is critical to this.

I know that there are other ministers, there are other members that will comment more on some of the fiscal and financial side of things, but I felt it was important that I commented from the perspective of a regulator because I think that there are huge opportunities in this bill for us to in fact do a better job at what Albertans expect us to do, to protect the environment, but to do so in a much more streamlined, effective way that will encourage investment in Alberta and will in fact address this whole issue of competitiveness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Five minutes for comment or question. The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for those comments. I was very encouraged to hear you talk about, basically, a one-window approach. Quite frankly, I think you're very accurate when you talk about different parts of government that have some jurisdiction and all the reports that have to be written, the regulations that pertain to different things.

I guess I'm wondering how far we can go down this road. I would envision a time when rather than being prescriptive as to how industry does something, we set out and have very specific targets that industry must meet at the end of the pipe or in the stack and let them figure out how they do it as opposed to us prescribing how they would get there. I think that that would cut down considerably on the regulations.

Really, I don't believe for a minute that within government we've got all of the answers. There's so much expertise out in the field, so much new technology that can be used, so many different ways that you could get to the same end result. I think it's critical that we be very prescriptive as to the standards that they must – must – meet, but let's let industry figure out how they get there and allow that kind of an exercise to work its way through.

Mr. Renner: Well, I think it was more a comment than a question, but I couldn't agree more. The member is absolutely right. There needs to be a transition from a regulatory mindset that is very prescriptive on what the inputs will be, the technology that will be employed, that then creates expectations on what the outcome is going to be rather than having a regulatory regime that is very prescriptive on what the outcome is that we expect and giving some flexibility to industry, to the approval holder, on how they achieve those outcomes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that being said, it then becomes imperative that we have a rigorous system in place to ensure that we are in fact holding the approval holders and industry accountable for those outcomes. It may not be that we save a whole lot of time and effort at the back end. In fact, we'd probably end up spending more time and effort on the part of government on ensuring that we achieve those outcomes, but we've given a great degree of flexibility on how we achieve those outcomes.

I should also point out, Mr. Speaker, that in achieving those outcomes, it would have to be, really, twofold. One is from an individual operator's perspective, but that all has to be within an overall global context of cumulative effects. It's one thing to achieve outcomes for individual operators. But if we don't take into account the cumulative effect of multiple operators all achieving their outcomes but at the end of the day perhaps not achieving our outcome as Albertans on air quality or water quality or the like – that is why we put so much emphasis on the development of a cumulative effects regulatory regime as well.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My favourite of the five preambles is the fifth, and it's suggesting: get your own house in order; proceed from a secure base. It's a great philosophy, but there's no mention of how we're going to get there or when we're going to get there.

With regard to the environmental balancing act I believe that future project approvals should be based on past reclamation. Demonstrate your responsibility.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, there may be a mistake. I think I'm triumphant on this one. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: All right.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and speak to Bill 1 this afternoon. Having listened intently to a number of my colleagues in the Legislature, I think it's very evident that all of us agree that competitiveness is very important for our province as we move forward. Certainly, as entrepreneurs and pioneers of what is, you know, a fairly young jurisdiction, we view this idea of competitiveness and being able to compete in the global environment as number one.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to refer to the throne speech, and I'm going to pick a couple of passages out of the throne speech that I think are pertinent here. The first: "Our world may have changed, but our people have not. They remain hard working and innovative, entrepreneurial and compassionate, and, most of all, confident about our province and its future."

Mr. Speaker, that confidence is well placed in the sense that we have made excellent investments in where we're going. We have certainly the lowest tax regime in the country. We have dollars on hand to do the things that we need to do. As the throne speech continues, it says: "That confidence is well placed. Our province has substantial cash reserves and low taxes, providing a solid foundation from which we can make a strong recovery." That is really, really true of our province, and certainly I think we can build upon that.

Another quote from the throne speech:

The global economy is undergoing profound changes, with significant impacts on the lives of Albertans. Our people are naturally entrepreneurial, and government has supported their drive to succeed with training, information, services, and counselling.

But, Mr. Speaker, the throne speech also says, "We can do better." I think that Bill 1 is one of the things where we're talking about doing it better.

Again to the throne speech:

We must succeed in maintaining and growing our markets and attracting and developing people and innovation. This is the route to the strong communities, healthy environment, quality of life, and prosperity that we want to pass on to future generations.

Bill 1 of this legislative session, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, will signal our government's resolve to make Alberta the most competitive jurisdiction in North America. To do this, we must minimize the cost of doing business here, including the cost of regulation, while at the same time providing the world-class services that are the hallmark of competitive jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, a little over a hundred years ago you can well imagine pioneers crossing the border of Alberta – well, there was no border for Alberta at that time – a very difficult thing to imagine. If you can imagine them trying to eke a life out of what to them would have been a very inhospitable climate, what would have been a very difficult situation, you have to admire the strength and the courage of those pioneers. You also have to admire the fact that they were competitive, that they were innovative, that they knew how to get their products to market. Then their market might have been the neighbour. Their market was the closest town. Perhaps that was what built that entrepreneurial spirit which carries on to this day in the population of Alberta. As the markets expanded and as communication expanded and as production expanded, we had to reach

more customers because we were creating more product than we could consume in our own jurisdiction.

That is certainly true today. Today we, obviously, produce way more energy than we can consume in a population of 3 and a half million people, we produce way more food than our population can consume, we are the number one cattle industry in the country, we are the number one energy industry in the country, we have a very, very strong forestry industry, but all of those industries are dependent upon trade, Mr. Speaker. All of those industries are dependent upon being globally competitive so that we can compete with others who are catching up to us and very quickly.

5:00

I think that really comes to the crux of the comment that I wanted to make, and that is: what does being competitive mean in today's environment? In today's environment it means working together. It means not competing within our own jurisdiction because, frankly, that's not our customer base. Our customer base is outside of our jurisdiction. It means that we have to work together to sell our own brand.

Mr. Speaker, prior to getting into this august Legislative Assembly, I was in international trade. I spent 20 some-odd years running around the world trying to sell product from our province, and what I learned in that situation is that you always have to be one step ahead of your competition. That means you have to move down the value chain. That means you have to be innovative. That's where Alberta has to move, and we have to signal that in whatever ways we possibly can. One of those ways, obviously, is by putting legislation in place that says that Alberta will be the most competitive jurisdiction in Canada and, hopefully, in the world in the areas that we work to. It says that we're going to respond to the province's needs but also to our customers' needs. We're going to seize on new opportunities.

Many of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly have said that Albertans have told us that they want us to get rid of the red tape. They want us to get rid of the bureaucratic walls that may be stopping them from doing the things that they need to do to be competitive. We need to be in touch with those markets that we're going to serve. We need to find out what our customers want, so we need to travel. We need to be out and in the face of our customers so that we can show them what we're doing but also recognize if we're doing it right or wrong.

In that sense it's working together with all levels of government. I know that the legislation contemplates a committee or a group that's going to look at how we can benchmark, how we can measure, and I think that's absolutely important. We had today an announcement from one of our universities in southern Alberta and one of the professors there that came up with his competitiveness report. I think it's important we take all of these things, Mr. Speaker, from all sectors of our economy, put them together, bring them together, work together in different levels of government, different departments of government, use that information to change how we do it and what we do.

We need to show the world like we did with Alberta Innovates, something we did in our department this past year, Mr. Speaker. We brought together all of the research entities in the province. We brought together all of the players, if you will, the stakeholders in research and innovation and commercialization of the province. We brought them together and said: "How can we be the best at what we do in the world? How can we make sure that we're commercializing things here in the province and creating wealth in the province?" They created Alberta Innovates, which is very similar to what the legislation contemplates, working together for a common goal, and

that is to have the jurisdiction of Alberta be the place to commercialize new technologies and new innovations.

We couldn't have done that, Mr. Speaker, if we hadn't done Campus Alberta first. Campus Alberta is another example of what happens when partnership and working together come together and you create a system and a framework where everybody can pull together for the common objective of the students, the taxpayers, society, and the economy. That, again, is predicated on being able to compete in a global market.

The Premier's mandate letters have also been driving this change and vision. It's a vision to be in a position to capitalize on that next generation economy. It's a vision to be able to capitalize on the resources and the partnerships that we've placed and we've created. The province, of course, is also blessed with another resource, and that's the talented and highly skilled researchers and entrepreneurs that we have within Campus Alberta and within Alberta Innovates. Thanks to their work we've been able to identify research and technology commercializations – in life sciences, in energy and environment, in nanotechnology, in ICT sectors – and strategic priorities of equal importance.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that these initiatives – Campus Alberta, bringing technology to market, and Alberta Innovates – aren't disparate or arbitrary initiatives. Each works in collaboration with the next, building on alignment among our postsecondary institutions, research organizations, and our innovation support services in business and entrepreneurs. It is all about working together.

Now, with each of these essential pieces in place, we have another solid foundation that we need to take the next step with, and that next step is Bill 1. Bill 1 clearly states in the second part of the bill, the mandate of the bill, that the goal is to increase Alberta's competitiveness by accelerating the implementation of current government of Alberta initiatives to increase competitiveness. It's important, Mr. Speaker, that when we travel abroad or when we're telling Albertans what we're doing, there is the message from this government that says: "Yes, we will do this. Yes, we will move forward with being competitive." Current initiatives like those I've just outlined.

Section 2 goes on to state that we're going to increase Alberta's competitiveness by developing a shared strategy to increase Alberta's competitiveness through strengthened collaboration with industry, business, and Albertans. Again, Mr. Speaker, very, very important to where we're headed in the future. My ministry has been strengthening collaboration among the stakeholders, as I've said, toward that very purpose as we've done Campus Alberta and Alberta Innovates. I can tell you that the staff within my ministry are ready and able to take all that we've developed through those collaborative processes and apply it to that next level.

Bill 1 does that very thing. It focuses on alignment of effort at the very next level, not just among our ministry's key stakeholders but right across government and among all of the government of Alberta ministries, working to improve Alberta's global competitiveness. I see this kind of government-wide support for initiatives already under way within the ministry as a very positive thing towards working with Bill 1. By aligning the various efforts of government and increasing co-ordination and collaboration among us all, we'll be able to make Alberta more competitive more quickly. Albertans have told us that as a province and as Albertans we must be competitive in that global economy.

Still in section 2 the bill states that we'll develop strategies and initiatives to encourage innovation and develop and adopt technology. Right up the ministry's alley, Mr. Speaker, and we're very, very pleased to see that in the bill. Again, it provides strength of

purpose. It puts that signal there for us. It really boils down to the old adage: the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Working together, we can make Alberta's economy competitive on a global stage more than any of us could do individually.

I believe that Bill 1 is that next logical step towards achieving Premier Stelmach's vision for Alberta. He envisions a knowledge-based economy, one where we're known around the world as the preferred global destination for turning ideas into products and services that can benefit people all around the world. He knows – and I think this is key to his strength as the Premier – that a strong, competitive economy is not an end unto itself. Instead, a strong economy is the means to achieve the things we want as part of a larger global society, like a strong health care system, like a world-class education system. We're ready to take that next step in the form of the Alberta Competitiveness Act because of the long-range planning that has characterized this Premier's leadership. It is the right way to go, and it's a signal to the world.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What I'm hearing from this minister adds to the confusion that I see in this bill. We're not sure whether we're competing or we're co-operating.

When it comes to the claim that Alberta has the lowest taxes, tell that to the middle class, that is unfairly burdened by the flat tax. We forgive a few people at the poverty end of the scale, and we reward the people at the upper end of the scale on the backs of the middle class. I have trouble with that concept.

Now, the Premier made such a boast about not increasing taxes. In fact, he went so far as to rescind the \$180 million of liquor taxes. Think what that would have paid for. It would have provided \$23 million for the teachers' settlement. It would have meant that there wouldn't have been a \$27 million cut to Children and Youth Services. It means that there wouldn't have been a cut to PDD. There are a whole bunch of areas where tax has a value. The Premier in stating that there would be no tax increases, I gather wasn't referring to the fact that the educational portion of the property tax is going up in municipalities across Alberta. So much for a tax freeze. The unfortunate part of that educational portion of the property tax is that it's not going to education; it's going into general revenue.

5:10

Now, in somewhat of a mixed revisionist history model the hon. minister of advanced education talked about competition being how the west was won. He put forward two notions in Alberta, that of the gunslinger, who succeeds in spite of everyone else, versus that of the barn raiser or the quilting bee. To me it's that co-operative spirit that's absolutely essential if we're going to be successful.

I agree with the minister about the whole being larger than the sum of its parts, and that's what the fifth premise in the preamble is about.

Whereas better alignment of activities across Government,
so first we get our own act together,
to strengthen partnerships among Albertans,
and then we build up that collaborative collective,
business, industry and Government will support the development of
a shared strategy to increase Alberta's competitiveness.

My vision of Alberta is a co-operative version, but how are we going to get there, I keep saying, and when will we know we have arrived?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a question?

Mr. Chase: Yes. How will we get there, and when will we know we've arrived?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, obviously, he worked real hard to find a question in that rant. It was interesting that first he talked about that we don't have the lowest taxes and that we're trying to hit the middle and lower incomes, and then he suggested that we should raise taxes on liquor. I'm assuming he doesn't assume that they buy liquor.

You know, we don't have a sales tax. Overall, Mr. Speaker, it is a true statement to say that Albertans are under the lowest tax regime of any province in Canada because we don't have a sales tax. We don't have a payroll tax. We have the highest personal income deduction level of any province in the country.

Mr. Speaker, it's nice to have a negative view of the world when that's what you want to have. I think the pioneers that came here weren't gunslingers, nor did I use that term; the hon. member did. They were very positive people, not negative. They viewed this province as having hope and prosperity for them and generations to come. And you know what? They were absolutely right because that's what's happened in this province. We have created an economy that still has hope, prosperity, and draws people from around the globe. And that's because of the competitive environment that we've created.

This bill signals to the world that we're going to continue with that competitive environment, that we're going to continue to create that kind of environment, because that's what Albertans want us to do, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today and respond to Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. Our Premier's strategy for economic recovery includes continuing to strengthen infrastructure in all regions of this province. In fact, his vision is to ensure that we can continue to have the most advanced public infrastructure in North America. This includes the roads, schools, hospitals, and other public infrastructure needed to support our growing economy and population.

Continuously improving our infrastructure will give us an edge in the global economy. This keeps us competitive and supports Bill 1. By building for tomorrow today, we are supporting the growth of our current and future generations. Our strong infrastructure will provide the environment needed to create new business opportunities, existing careers, and high-paying jobs.

Through careful planning Alberta is in the best financial position of all provinces, with the most innovative and competitive economy in North America. We are looking far ahead and planning for the long term.

When the recession hit, jurisdictions throughout Canada were rushing to find shovel-ready capital projects to invest in, even at the cost of going into debt. Here in Alberta we already had a long-term, 20-year strategic capital plan, hon. Speaker. A 20-year strategic capital plan. Unlike most jurisdictions we were and are in a position to invest in our infrastructure, and we have the money in the bank to pay for it. It only makes sense to buy what we need now, when the prices are low and the materials and the labour are available.

Our sustainability fund is providing us with cash reserves, so we can use them now. Due to careful planning this province has saved billions of dollars from surpluses in good years. We are using those

cash reserves strategically to position Alberta to come out of this recession stronger and faster than any other jurisdiction in North America.

Alberta's investment in infrastructure is nearly double the per capita average of other provinces. In total, the 2010-2013 capital plan supports more than \$20 billion in capital projects, over \$7 billion this fiscal year alone.

We are continuing work on the federal building, on the new remand centre, and the Edmonton clinic. We are delivering 18 new schools this September, two years sooner under the P3 partnership than would have been possible using traditional delivery models. These will all be top-quality, energy efficient buildings that all Albertans can be proud of.

When building modern infrastructure to meet Alberta's needs, it is vital to look beyond the bricks and mortar. It is what happens inside our buildings that is critical. Albertans and the services we deliver to them are our first priority, and we are always striving for the best way to deliver what Albertans need. By successfully meeting the needs of Albertans, we are also showing our best face to the world. Safe, modern, and efficient infrastructure is essential to the growing economy to create the wealth and prosperity needed to sustain social programs and services. This is why infrastructure is an economic enabler, a force that will enhance Alberta's competitiveness on the global scale.

Strong infrastructure will help Alberta continue to attract investment, to provide jobs and prosperity. While we do need to be careful with our dollars, cutting back on infrastructure during a downturn is not a smart long-term move. Investment in infrastructure keeps Albertans working. This year's infrastructure investment will support about 70,000 jobs.

Mr. Rodney: How many?

Mr. Danyluk: Seventy thousand.

That means 70,000 more Albertans will have security, and those 70,000 Albertans will continue to spend money and spur growth in other parts of the economy.

Bill 1 will enhance the conditions for competitiveness in this province by enabling better alignment of activities across government. This will strengthen partnerships among Albertans, business, industry, and government.

Striving for the best public services and the most competitive economic environment will attract the best and brightest to help build our province. We can no longer use our neighbours in B.C. and Saskatchewan to measure our successes. Instead, we need to work with those neighbours to be competitive in much bigger markets.

We must position our province so that we come out of this recession bigger, stronger, and smarter than ever before. We must build innovative, reliable public infrastructure to ensure our industries are competitive. We must establish this province as an economic leader in the postrecession world. Alberta needs to and will compete and win on the global economic stage. We need to aim high because aiming high is the Alberta way.

Thank you.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for that very inspiring speech on how we're going to do so much in the competitive field and how this bill allows that to happen.

I'm curious. You mentioned a lot of buildings, and I imagine you're thinking of schools and hospitals and those kinds of things. You mentioned roads and investing in those kinds of things. I wonder if you would expound on how it is that this is going to help make us competitive and how this bill encourages that kind of thing. You did mention: competitive in the world. That's what is so critical. Of course, I think that you could validly bring in TILMA and how working with the other provinces is going to help us in the world market. If you could elaborate with those comments on the infrastructure.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let me talk about Alberta and the need to ensure that competitiveness is in place and alive and well and that the investors and the people that are in other parts of this great country in North America and in other parts of the world see Alberta as an opportunity, see Alberta as having an advantage of where they want to raise their children, where they want to work, and where they have opportunity.

If I can just go back a little bit, Mr. Speaker, and talk a little bit about history. What happened is that when this government eliminated the machinery and equipment tax to encourage investment, encourage development in this province, that is what has made this province what it is today. The hon. member was part of that decision, and it was a decision of foresight. It was a decision that enabled this province to be at the competitive level where it is today.

I want to say to you that when we talk about the competitiveness and the importance of having a sustainability fund, our Premier and this government have had the foresight to bring forward a sustainability fund. What does the sustainability fund do? It does two things: it takes off some of the hills, and it fills some of the valleys. It gives opportunity for people who have come to this province to make a living over the long term, not that they would make a living today and starve tomorrow. Mr. Speaker, that advantage of having a continuum of funding, having a continuum of \$20 billion over three years, \$7 billion a year, provides that opportunity. What it does is that it brings people to this province. It makes and has people come into this province to invest.

What exactly does that mean? That means that we have to be ready for the next growth spurt. It means that we cannot forget about business and the people of this province. We have to build the schools, and we have to build the hospitals, and we have to ensure that this economy does a couple of things, that this economy provides the opportunity when the growth spurt comes back but also provides the jobs.

Now, when it provides those jobs, it provides stability. What does it do with the discussion, if I can say, of stability? It makes this province, as I said before, a place that people want to come to. It is a province where there is opportunity. It is a province of hope. It is a province of the future.

Mr. Speaker, if I can say, when we talk about those types of opportunities and the opportunities into the future of our children because of the education system that we have, because of the postsecondary education system that we have, as well as having the infrastructure in place in regard to hospitals, to making sure that we are ready, I think that is the most important part.

When we look at the Minister of Transportation – and he left. He escaped, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's going to be hard to follow, but I'll give it a go.

More than obviously, I'm pleased to rise today and join all of my colleagues speaking in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. It's no secret. We are extremely fortunate to live in the province of Alberta, free to pursue our dreams, our ambitions, to be presented with opportunities that, quite simply, are not afforded to people in many other places around the world. Even with this global economic recession, we find ourselves as Albertans in a much better economic situation than most. But this province's success didn't happen by coincidence. It happened because of the vision, the foresight, and the entrepreneurship that have been cultivated in a long history of successful Albertans working to better their province and to better the lot of their family.

I support Bill 1 because it, I think, will work closely with our industry, with our business leaders, in fact with all Albertans towards a shared goal of making the province one of the most competitive jurisdictions in the world. Bill 1 will enhance Alberta's competitiveness in that global economic market that we live in today. It's about helping Alberta business so that we can continue to maintain and improve on an excellent standard of living that we currently enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, there are several factors that affect that economic competitiveness in our province. For example, we could talk about taxation rates, we could talk about regulatory burden, and we certainly need to talk about trade access. Alberta is already a leader in many of these areas. We have the lowest personal and corporate tax rates in the country, we have no provincial sales tax, and we have the highest tax exemption for families.

Alberta is also competitive because of the trading relationships which it has established. We already have a free trade relationship with the United States through NAFTA and a groundbreaking economic relationship, TILMA, with our neighbour to the west, British Columbia. I'm also pleased that we're making progress on a western economic partnership that includes both Saskatchewan and British Columbia, which ultimately will create Canada's largest free trade zone.

Now, it's true that many will view competitiveness solely in terms of royalty rates, our Alberta energy industry. While I think it's critically important that this industry remain strong, I would argue that competitiveness must extend to all sectors of our economy.

5:30

Specifically, I'd like to talk about competitiveness from the standpoint of small business. Small business and entrepreneurs are a significant driving force in our economy. In addition, they are often the sources of the technological innovation and development that blossoms into outcomes that benefit all Albertans. Small businesses in my constituency of Red Deer-South not only help to shape our community, but they also contribute to the prosperity of the entire province.

Therefore, when we talk about competitiveness, we're also talking about the steps that we can take to enhance and promote small business. One such step is promoting the reduction of regulatory burdens. Regulations are never created with the intent of placing an undue burden on our small business community. As a government and a member of the Regulatory Review Secretariat I believe that it falls upon us to look at these regulations and adjust them to make them workable for our business community. Now, that is not to say that we should cut regulations simply for the sake of cutting regulation. Rather, we need to tailor our regulations to suit specific industries while ensuring that we do not compromise our commitment to environmental standards, health standards, and public safety. I believe that by doing this, we can improve the competitiveness of our small business community.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would again like to applaud the government for the foresight required to draft the Alberta Competitiveness Act. This action demonstrates that even though we are the most competitiveness jurisdiction in Canada, we must always be looking to the future to ensure that we retain our competitive edge.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments and voice my support for Bill 1. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have Standing Order 29(2)(a), five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Member for Red Deer-South for his comments with regard to Bill 1 and share his sentiment with regard to the opportunity that is provided through the spirit of Bill 1 and, I think, the direction that it takes, that is well indicated within the preamble of the bill and the specifics that it speaks about. I think that the direction of this bill is something that will very closely resonate with the average Albertan.

Given your experience with the competitiveness review commission and your experience in small business and your reference to the small business community – and I share your concern and your belief that this will resonate with small business because the cost of the regulatory burden to small business in this country and in this province is significant in the time that it takes from small business owners. One of the things I've done in my constituency is talked with some constituents about: what are the things that hamper competitiveness or that get in the way of competitiveness, whether it's regulatory concerns or other things that we can do to be more competitive?

My question for the Member for Red Deer-South: does the Member for Red Deer-South have some instances or some particular areas that he can identify that we need to address, specific situations that Albertans will connect with? I think at the end of the day that's something that this bill will address. I'm wondering if the Member for Red Deer-South could comment on that.

Mr. Dallas: I'd be delighted to, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, we can have a broader discussion than the burden of regulation, but I think small business is particularly impacted by regulation by virtue that larger enterprises have the capacity to develop a compliance unit within their enterprise to be constantly on the lookout for the kinds of activities that their company is engaged in and the responsibilities that they have in complying with legislation.

Small business, on the other hand, often single owner-operator enterprises, family-based enterprise units, or two or three employees: much more significant challenges with respect to managing that. Those entrepreneurs work long days often actually delivering the services related to the business; evenings are spent doing books, filling out forms, complying with all of the requirements that we provide to them. Often they really don't have a problem with the issues around environmental compliance, public safety, health. These are things that business understands and knows that they need to do well. The issue is really not about: what are the requirements of the regulations? It's the requirements of the reporting, I think, that are significant to business.

I think that what we have in front of us is a great opportunity to work with all Albertans to look at compliance requirements not to say, "How can we take down the requirements that are necessary, that have been debated in this Assembly in terms of what we need to do to ensure that environmental standards are met, that public health is not at risk, that safety is there?" but to say, "What are the

processes that we've surrounded those requirements with, and are there some things that we can do that ultimately would streamline that process, that would reduce the time that it takes business to effectively complete the requirement that they have, and in the course of that would we positively affect the productivity, which is so important to our competitiveness, as a result of potentially removing some of that underbrush that's requiring time, that's really unnecessary, and again, most importantly, ensuring the compliance to the requirements that we've established in this province that are so important?"

The Deputy Speaker: You have eight seconds.

Ms Blakeman: So what you're talking about is not so much the compliance but the reporting on the compliance. Is that correct?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I would like to start by thanking our hon. Premier for bringing forward this inspired piece of legislation that would see government and industry come together to create a more competitive and prosperous Alberta. Despite tough times Albertans can remain optimistic when looking forward because in times like these Albertans roll up their sleeves and work together to ensure a bright future. Bill 1 recognizes this and moves Alberta to adapt to the change in the world economy.

Mr. Speaker, this innovative piece of legislation will examine ways to further improve Alberta's competitiveness position. For instance, it will increase collaboration between government, industry, and business. This will allow development of Alberta's competitiveness and provide long-term benefits for Alberta families and the entire province. This government will use this legislation to build upon and strengthen current initiatives such as Alberta Innovates, the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, and the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA. These programs already give Alberta a competitive edge, which will be bolstered by the Alberta Competitiveness Act. There will also be recommendations to enhance Alberta's competitiveness in the global marketplace.

Mr. Speaker, ministers and stakeholders will review all economic sectors and determine whether Alberta can strengthen its competitiveness advantage. Through Bill 1 Albertans can create a more prosperous economy, which will benefit all citizens, including our most vulnerable. In addition, the Alberta Competitiveness Act will enable Albertans to construct a better future while utilizing the initiatives this province has already put in place, initiatives like the sustainability fund, which cushions Alberta from the full brunt of any economic downswings. Due to this excellent fiscal planning and a commitment to savings for a rainy day, this government has put itself in a fortunate position. In addition, Bill 1 will let this province continue to build on our strengths and result in an outstanding quality of life for all Albertans.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, regardless of our individual affiliations I think we can all agree that Alberta is already a leader in many fields. Our

trade programs, for example, are second to none in Canada. As a journeyman mechanic in my former life I understand the importance of training Albertans to work in the trades. I believe very strongly that as Albertans we're lucky to have the incredible opportunities to learn and develop our skills in our province.

For example, when I was a teacher, I served as a registered apprenticeship program co-ordinator at one of the Edmonton public schools. For those who don't know the RAP program, it allows high school students to work in a field they are interested in while allowing them to earn credits towards a high school diploma. It also qualifies up to 500 students for scholarships in Alberta in order to continue training in the trade of their choice, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to programs available, there's also great infrastructure support to help learn trades in Alberta. Recently I attended an open house at Amiskwaciy Academy, which is run by Edmonton public schools for their skills centre, which was built to help students gain real-world experience with hands-on courses. The visit really opened my eyes on how committed our schools are to helping students learn the trades by building world-class facilities and developing world-class programs.

Mr. Speaker, these are just two examples. There are many, many programs out there for all Albertans right across the province. From the better known trades like carpentry, plumbing, automotives, and welding to trades like toolmaker, baker, cosmetologist, hairstylist, ironworker – I could go on and on – the options that today's Albertan has are truly incredible. My point is that as a province we are already doing really innovative things, and this is all part of increasing our competitive edge. By training Albertans in all these different trades and committing to programs that allow them to pursue their future, it is easy to see why Alberta truly is the best place to live, work, and invest.

Tradespeople are benefiting from learning skills and becoming more competitive in the labour marketplace. Companies are benefiting from a homegrown, talented, and skilled workforce, and all Albertans benefit from our products becoming superior to our competitors' and becoming increasingly relied upon thanks to the skills of our workers trained right here in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, these types of innovative programs should be continually examined and strengthened. I see that as part of what Bill 1 will do. Because of this I strongly support this bill and would once again like to thank our hon. Premier for showing incredible vision in doing what is best for all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I would like to move to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate members for a good afternoon of lively debate and remind all that we have another lively contest on in Vancouver tonight, and we may want to find out how the Canadians are doing against the Russians. For that reason I move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:45 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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