



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Third Session

# Alberta Hansard

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

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

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 25, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Hon. members, today is the fifth anniversary of the four fallen RCMP members who lost their lives in Mayerthorpe March 3, 2005, and our prayer today will include a moment of silence.

We give thanks for the lives of Your faithful servants who defend the freedoms and values that are a true expression of Your divine intent. We humbly ask Your blessings and grace upon the lives of Canadian police officers and military personnel lost in service to their countrymen.

I would ask you now to observe a moment of silence.

May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may a nation be eternally grateful. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

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

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured today to introduce the Hon. Michael de Jong, the Attorney General of the province of British Columbia, who also represents the constituency of Abbotsford West. Over the noon hour, which has been my third opportunity to meet with the minister, I had the opportunity to talk to him about the work that we are doing together across western provinces and particularly in B.C. and Alberta on ways to make our communities safer and to ensure that people in our provinces feel more secure. I am pleased today to ask the minister to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 32 of Alberta's brightest and best students. They're visiting us from the East elementary school in Leduc, which is my hometown. They are accompanied by four staff: teachers Roxanne Brayford and Tanya Dukeshire and educational assistants Shelley Hanson and Nikki Lafreniere. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that our guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 11 current participants from the municipal internship program. I had a chance to meet with them earlier, and I'm very confident that we have a great group of future municipal administrators. The municipal internship program encourages recent postsecondary graduates to pursue a career in municipal government. The program provides an opportunity to gain first-hand municipal experience. Since 2002, 86 interns have completed the program. This increases the pool of trained, skilled professionals who manage our municipalities.

The municipal interns with us today are Charlotte Nesbit, the city of Camrose; Sean Lee, the town of Beaumont; Darren Reedy, the town of Didsbury; Jared Milne, the town of Morinville; Arlos Crofts, the town of Ponoka; Keith Davis, the town of Raymond; Michelle Neilson, the town of Sylvan Lake; Ian Phillips, municipal district of Foothills and the town of High River; Matthew Kreke, the county of Newell; Meredith Seeton, Vulcan county; Kristen Tuff, county of Wetaskiwin. Mr. Speaker, joining the interns today are four program staff from Municipal Affairs: Wendy Peters, the manager of the internship program; Val Hope, internship adviser; Kristine Jonah, internship adviser; and the other internship adviser, Melanie Wood. These individuals are all seated in the members' gallery today, and I would like to ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a constituent of mine, Lori Simon. Ms Simon has had a long interest in the workings of government and also in learning more about the processes and proceedings undertaken during question period in the Legislative Assembly. As her MLA I'm pleased to have her attend today. I'd ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three outstanding social workers who have joined us as we recognize the first week of March as National Social Work Week. We thank all social workers across the province, who work hard to support our children, youth, and families in our communities.

Our guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that each of you rise as I introduce you to the members of the Assembly. We have the executive director and registrar of the Alberta College of Social Workers, Rod Adachi. We also have Line Brunelle, who has her diploma and is currently completing her bachelor of social work. Also, we have Connie Zacharias, who has worked in our department for almost 25 years and is the recipient of the award of excellence from the Alberta College of Social Workers. Well done, Connie. She is joined by her husband, Richard, and her son Shane, who, as he said to me earlier, is very proud of his mom. I'd ask that everyone here please join me in giving the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Shahid Hassan, seated today in the members' gallery. Mr. Hassan is president of the Bangladesh Canada Association of Edmonton. This past weekend I was honoured to join the association in celebrating International Mother Language Day at the Pleasantview community hall along with 400 other Albertans. For those who do not know, International Mother Language Day was declared by UNESCO in 1999 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity as well as multilingualism. I think we can all appreciate the importance of our own mother languages in shaping ourselves, our families, and our communities. I would like to thank Shahid Hassan for continuing to champion this important work. At this time I ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly seven members from the Harmony Dialogue Group in the constituency of Edmonton-Calder. They're a hard-working nonprofit organization that focuses on intercultural understanding through volunteer-powered events. They were here today to distribute Noah's pudding in the lower rotunda. I'll discuss a little more about this group in a member's statement later this afternoon. For now I would like the members to rise as I introduce them: Mr. Ibrahim Cin, the executive director; Dr. Fatih Dogan and Mr. Taner Tunali, board members; and the four other members of the Harmony Dialogue Group that are here with them as well. I'd ask you to receive the traditional warm greetings of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is a new and unique facility in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. This facility has provided services since November and opened its doors officially in January. I met some of the staff and asked them to please come down and be introduced. I'll be doing a member's statement later to talk about the facility, but what we're talking about is the new Today Family Violence Help Centre. With us we have Patrick Dillon, who is the executive director. Please rise, Patrick. As well, Megan Davies has joined us. She is a resource worker at this wonderful new centre. Please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

### Ministerial Statements

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

### Fallen Four in Memoriam

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to mark a tragic anniversary and a dark day in the history of our province, the day we lost four RCMP members near the town of Mayerthorpe. Peter Schiemann, Brock Myrol, Anthony Gordon, and Leo Johnston tragically lost their lives in the line of duty on March 3, 2005. I think we all remember the moment when we heard of the shocking events on that day. Their deaths and those of all police and peace officers who perished in the line of duty are a national tragedy. Albertans, indeed all Canadians, continue to mourn their loss.

**1:40**

Mr. Speaker, police and peace officers play an important role in our daily lives here in Alberta and across Canada. They uphold the laws of our land, protect our families, keep our communities and neighbourhoods safe. Every day they leave for work never knowing what they will encounter in the line of duty. The deaths of these four officers remind us of the risks that all police officers face while carrying out their duties.

So many people were touched by this senseless tragedy, Mr. Speaker. Five years later the pain and grief are still with us. These four members deserve our deepest gratitude for their sacrifice. Today I hope we all honour the memories of Peter, Brock, Anthony, and Leo. On behalf of a grateful province I extend our deepest sympathies to their families, friends, and colleagues, who continue to live with the loss. They will forever be remembered for their courage and bravery.

I ask all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, to remember these four men and all of the peace and police officers who gave the ultimate sacrifice in service to their communities, their province, and their fellow citizens. May God grant them all eternal rest.

**Mr. Hehr:** Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General has spoken with eloquence and sincerity on an issue that deeply touches Albertans. I want to thank him for honouring the four fallen officers and the men and women who risk their lives on behalf of each of us every day. Well said, hon. Minister.

As a person whose life has been directly affected by crime and violence, I have the deepest appreciation and respect for police officers. I understand the risks they face every day, the sacrifices they make to protect our lives and our values. Canadians value law and order very highly. It's part of our national culture. Whereas the opening up of the American frontier has been characterized as a chaotic Wild West, we took a different route, sending out the North West Mounted Police first to ensure that the law and peace were upheld and respected even before European settlers made their way across the prairies.

Peter Schiemann, Brock Myrol, Anthony Gordon, and Leo Johnston were following that proud tradition when they were senselessly murdered. There are no words that can ever heal the pain of this tragedy, but I hope that their loved ones can take some solace in the deeply felt regrets and compassion that all Albertans felt and continue to feel surrounding this terrible incident.

In many ways the men and women of the RCMP and our other police and peace services are ordinary people – husbands, wives, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, parents – but in one particular way they are truly extraordinary. For the sake of the safety of their fellow Canadians they risk everything every day. Sometimes, as in Mayerthorpe five years ago, they pay a terrible price for their altruism.

Thank you, Peter. Thank you, Brock. Thank you, Anthony. Thank you, Leo. For your sacrifice we are eternally grateful. May your friends, families, in fact all Albertans take comfort in the knowledge that your sacrifice was not in vain, but it was in order to uphold the highest ideals of our civilization.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I believe that additional members would want to make comment today with respect to this very tragic anniversary. I'll ask one question: does any member object to additional members participating? If you do object, just simply say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many Albertans and Canadians March 3, 2005, will always be remembered as a dark day in our history. The shocking news immediately made headlines around the world and would go down in history as Canada's worst police killing. Constables Brock Myrol, 29; Anthony Gordon, 28; Leo Johnston, 32; and Peter Schiemann, 25, were doing what they loved and what they were sworn to do when joining the RCMP, which was to ensure the safety and security of the people who lived in their community. These brave men will always be remembered for their dedication, their determination, their valour, their gallantry, and the sacrifice they made to protect the citizens that they were sworn to protect. As a former Solicitor General I had the opportu-

nity to travel the province and meet many of these brave men and women of the RCMP. They are truly among Alberta's and Canada's finest.

Today we honour the lives of the Fallen Four RCMP constables and extend our thoughts and our prayers to their loved ones as the fifth anniversary of their deaths approaches.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to take this opportunity to again express my condolences to the family of Leo Johnston, Anthony Gordon, Peter Schiemann, and Brock Myrol on the fifth anniversary of their deaths near Mayerthorpe. March 3, 2005, is a painful memory for the loved ones of those four RCMP constables, the people of Mayerthorpe and its area, and all Albertans. It serves as a reminder of the dangers that people in uniform face. They accept a duty to uphold the law and protect all of us, and sometimes the price they pay is extremely high. Law enforcement in Alberta had never experienced a tragedy of this scale, and we are all united in the hope that we will never see anything like it again.

The Fallen Four Memorial Park in Mayerthorpe is evidence of the community's dedication to preserving the memory of these individuals. It also shows the determination of the people of Mayerthorpe to move beyond their grief and celebrate the lives of these four men, something many Albertans will be reflecting on in the coming days.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and the House for this opportunity.

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

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank all those that have so caringly expressed their condolences to the families. Not just the families but the communities of Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt suffered a sincere loss. Next week in Mayerthorpe on March 3 at 7 o'clock at the Fallen Four memorial site there will be a ceremony. I wish to extend an invitation to any one of you that would like to attend on behalf of their constituencies to attend this event with me.

Thank you, sir.

### Members' Statements

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

#### Harmony Dialogue Group

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk a little more about the Harmony Dialogue Group, that I just introduced. They came to the Legislature today to distribute Noah's pudding for Ashurah, an important day of observance for many Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Ashurah falls on the 10th day of the month of Muharram in the Islamic lunar calendar. Noah's pudding is a healthy dessert filled with nuts and fruits, and I hope that many of my colleagues had a chance to taste this pudding first-hand today because it was very good.

In the Turkish culture this pudding commemorates the Biblical story of the landing of Noah's ark. They believe that towards the end Noah was running low on rations and cooked this dish from whatever happened to be left over. They distribute this dish each year to members of their community through churches, schools, and other organizations to raise awareness about harmony within the community.

The Harmony Dialogue Group has sister organizations in major cities like Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Melbourne, as well as in many other countries around the world. The motto for this group is From Dialogue through Hospitality to Friendship. They believe that we can all exist together despite our differences in backgrounds and cultures. By sharing their pudding, the Harmony Dialogue Group encourages involvement, participation, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation in and amongst communities and organizations. It is their hope that together we can find a dialogue that helps to make the connections between communities stronger.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### 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. Yesterday in the House the Premier was asked questions that came directly from guests in the gallery. The Premier was dismissive and perhaps disrespectful of the guests by not answering their questions. Today we ask the Premier to do the right thing and provide real answers, that the guests were seeking. To the Premier. The Seniors budget shows \$119 million allocated to supports for the delivery system. What does this money pay for, and why is there such a large difference in how this is allocated across six PDD regions?

1:50

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we have provision for discussion of estimates. All departments are bringing their estimates forward. I believe the opposition has close to two hours on each department to ask these questions. The ministers are able to provide specifics to every line item in that budget.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, Mr. Speaker, another question from yesterday: why is \$915,000 going to board governance when the board members are typically volunteers? Why is there such a large difference in this spending between the six regions?

**Mr. Stelmach:** A very good question. We'll find out during the estimates why the discrepancy, and if there are some boards that are charging more for their input as board members than others, then we want to know about it. If some are doing that on a volunteer basis, we certainly commend them and will try and find out why other boards aren't doing it.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, since Seniors is already done, Mr. Speaker, I guess I would ask a third question to the Premier. The minister of seniors stated that the PDD budget will not be increased but that any efficiency savings that come from her department would be directed to front-line staff. How much will need to be found in efficiencies to accommodate PDD caseloads, that are increasing by 50 to 100 per year?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the overall support for the vulnerable has increased in the budget, but the question I would have to the hon. member is: why is it that the good questions have now come from those that offered those questions and not from members across the House? Now he's saying that we've already done the estimates and that we can't ask those questions. I would say: put those questions all in writing, and the minister will give detail to every question.

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

### Municipal Sustainability Funding

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government likes to talk up its municipal sustainability funding. In fact, in press releases it's claiming that the municipal sustainability initiative will be maintained over time, but this program is now being stretched out far beyond the original number of years. Again to the Premier: given that the government is providing less each year than was agreed upon when the MSI was signed three years ago, why is the government claiming in press releases that funding has actually increased?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we are committed to \$11.3 billion over 10 years. Given this economic downturn I spoke very honestly in open dialogue with municipalities and said: "Look, we can't dip even further into savings than we have already to date to sustain municipal funding. Would you be open to stretching that 10-year period another year or two?" All municipalities agree that that's the way to go. They appreciate the funding. Notwithstanding the fact that it isn't as much as what they thought they were going to receive in the original plan, it is still much more than any other province supports their municipalities anywhere in the country of Canada.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the question was: why is the government claiming to be increasing the funding?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Municipalities are receiving today more for infrastructure than back in 2007. That's very clear.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the original deal promised to stretch out over 10 years, but now the money is going to be stretched over more, so less money each year. Does the Premier accept that his government broke its word again to municipalities in the province?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we're working in partnership with municipalities.

The other thing is that we are receiving some very, very, very good tenders on infrastructure in the province, whether it be the building of roads, replacement of water or sewer, improvements to infrastructure no matter where we are in the province of Alberta, sometimes with as much as 40 per cent savings. So there may be less going this year in terms of some very specific grants, but on the other hand we're getting a very good buy for the money that we're investing in infrastructure. I would say that most municipalities said that it more than equals what they've seen in reduction in their municipal funding.

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

### Cabinet Policy Committees

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When asked about appointments to cabinet policy committees on Tuesday, it was stated that members were paid according to order in council, but that wasn't the question. The question was: how are Conservative members appointed? The Legislative Assembly Act states that to be paid for committee work, members must be appointed by order in council, by regulation, or ministerial order. To the Premier: since we know the appointments were not made by order in council, how did the Premier appoint all 69 Conservative members to the cabinet policy committees without violating the Legislative Assembly Act?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the other day the member asked for a copy of the order in council. Unfortunately, I didn't bring it with me here today, but I believe that order in council was issued close to two years ago. It's public. For all orders in council, as soon as they're signed, copies are left with all members of the media. I know the media has them, and we'll make sure that a copy is given to the opposition.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the Premier is confused and does not understand. We're not after the order in council that set up the fee schedule for the committee work. We are after the order in council, if it does exist, for the appointments to the five cabinet policy committees that you set up so that each and every Conservative MLA last year received \$1.4 million. Show us that order in council, or you're in violation of the act.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. Each member did not receive \$1.4 million. You know, one day we don't have an order in council, and today we do have an order in council. All members were appointed to CPC through ministerial order. The order in council gave, very publicly, the rate of pay to those members.

**Mr. MacDonald:** He's digging himself in deeper, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the Premier. If what the Premier stated on Tuesday is true, that the cabinet policy committees are "not committees of the Legislature," why does the order in council or the ministerial order that sets out the fee schedule for these committees fall under the authority of the Legislative Assembly Act, specifically section 37? Are you not violating that section?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, this is almost a point of privilege at this stage.

**An Hon. Member:** He needs a lawyer.

**Mr. Hancock:** The hon. member is not entitled to ask for legal advice, but he probably should get legal advice if he can't even read section 37 of the Legislative Assembly Act, which allows for the payment of members in a number of different circumstances. One of the ways that Members of the Legislative Assembly are paid is pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the allocations under the Members' Services Committee. Another way that Members of the Legislative Assembly are paid is if they take on other responsibilities. Some serve as members of Executive Council, some serve as members of cabinet policy committees, as an example, and some in the past have served as members of agencies, boards, and commissions, and the Legislative Assembly Act specifically allows and provides for that.

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

### Royalty Framework

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under previous leadership the government could actually brag that Alberta was the best place to do business. We had low taxes, an economy that was firing on all cylinders, and we had a balanced budget. Today that has been eroded by this government and this Premier. We condemned this government's decision to increase royalties and undermine the confidence of people wanting to invest in Alberta. To the Premier: what compelled him to destroy investors' confidence in Alberta and make our oil and gas industry the most uncompetitive in Canada?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we have seen record investments in the oil sands over the last couple of years.

With respect to the issue on natural gas there has been a significant play now in shale gas not only in British Columbia and Saskatchewan but in various states in the United States. In fact, indeed, according to the latest *The Economist* thousands of trillions of cubic feet of shale gas could be found in countries around the world. There are significant pressures, and that's why we introduced Bill 1, the Competitiveness Act, and I encourage all members to actively participate in the debate.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has a predictable pattern. They make bad decisions and then refuse to recognize that they are responsible for the consequences. When this government plowed ahead with changes to the royalty, it ignored industry concerns, dismissed opinions from the investment community, ignored pleas from small communities across Alberta, and refused to change course even when its own members and our party pointed out the problems. To the Premier: why did he want to tax our oil and gas industry out of Alberta?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the royalty and all of the other issues related to competitiveness are overarching in terms of the oil and gas industry, agriculture, forestry, and also tourism. That's why we're looking at competitiveness in all the fields, coming forward with measurements to make sure that we're the most innovative and competitive economy in North America. We are going to get there. We'll have to make adjustments. There's a huge global economic shift, and there's huge competition amongst countries for not only investment but for people as well.

2:00

**Mr. Hinman:** Mr. Premier, your decision for the new royalty framework will go down in history as the most draconian and worst decision ever made by a Premier of this province. Albertans have never forgiven Trudeau and the Liberals for the national energy program, and they'll never forgive you for your new royalty framework.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

#### Alberta's Showcase at 2010 Winter Olympics

**Mr. Prins:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Olympics have been going on for some time now in Vancouver and have generated a lot of excitement and interest in winter sports. We want to wish all our Canadian athletes the very best. The world's attention has been on Canada, and this has created a perfect opportunity for Albertans to promote our province and our products.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that Monday was an important day for Alberta food products at the Olympics. My question to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: what was involved in that day, and how were you able to promote Alberta's food products?

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

**Mr. Hayden:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, Monday was Alberta food day at the Olympics in Vancouver. We have over 20 producers and processors of Alberta food products in the province that provided food for the Olympic experience, and food writers from around the globe were invited to sample Alberta's offerings on

Monday along with members of the public at Alberta House. It was an unbelievable experience, and there was nothing left on the plates. I'm sure they enjoyed the experience.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can speak from experience. I was there a couple of weeks ago, and the food was good at Alberta House.

**An Hon. Member:** Who paid for it?

**Mr. Prins:** I paid for it.

My second question is to the same minister. What other efforts are being made to showcase our agricultural products in Vancouver?

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

**Mr. Hayden:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a great opportunity for Albertans to showcase how proud they are not only of their province but of their country because many people, of course, don't speak that way. Over the Olympic experience 18,000 to 20,000 people from around the world will taste what Alberta has to offer. That's our future for our second-largest industry and our largest sustainable industry and renewable industry.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister: has our presence at the Olympics opened any doors for expanding our markets?

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

**Mr. Hayden:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we've had opportunities to meet with a number of people in the food industry that are already exporting products into other countries and want to locate in Alberta and want to add employment and want to further export products and increase our market share.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

#### Bitumen Upgrading

**Mr. Taylor:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how I'm going to follow that, but I'll try.

Today we learned of another move by oil sands companies to limit the amount of bitumen being upgraded here in the province of Alberta. We need this value-added industry. We need the jobs and the taxes that it brings, and we need the industrial by-products that it makes. To the Minister of Energy: does the minister accept that this cutback and others like it are a serious blow to maintaining a substantial upgrading industry in the province of Alberta?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, as I've stated in the House before, Mr. Speaker, these are business decisions, and they're made on the basis of whether or not they're economically profitable. Ideally, obviously, Alberta would like to have more upgrader capacity in Alberta, but when the margin is very narrow, you're not likely to encourage private-sector investment in that business.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government keeps talking about bitumen royalties in kind, but these kinds of shifts indicate that that's not going to keep a very large proportion of bitumen here in Alberta, so I'd like to know from the minister what's next. What else does the minister have to use because the bitumen royalty in kind program seems clearly not to be enough?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, I don't agree with the member, Mr. Speaker. The bitumen royalty in kind is a very important program that's been introduced by our government. We believe over time that that will be a very wise decision. As production ramps up, there are opportunities for increased bitumen for the people of Alberta. As you know, we have a proposal out there right now for an upgrader to upgrade the Alberta portion of the BRIK program, and I think that's going to be, if we look back 10 years from now, a very important decision.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While we wait for the government to act, long-term decisions are getting finalized by industry. I understand the proposal is out there. We need some time, but time matters. So how long do Albertans have to wait before the minister starts to push other means of adding value here in the province?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, again, I don't agree with the preamble, Mr. Speaker. The impression was left that somehow Alberta is not coming forward with initiatives. The BRIK initiative is a clear indication of what we're prepared to do to ensure that Albertans going forward have the opportunity to benefit from upgraded bitumen in this province, and we'll continue to do that.

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

#### Cabinet Travel to the 2010 Winter Olympics

**Mr. Rogers:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a very large Alberta presence at the Vancouver Olympic Games, and I'm not just talking about curlers like Kevin Martin or Cheryl Bernard or a hockey player like Jarome Iginla. We've got the Alberta express, we've got Alberta House, and of course attendance by a number of cabinet ministers. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Mr. Minister, are there some real benefits that I can tell my constituents about, or are we just being good neighbours?

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, thank you very much for the question. I was one of the cabinet ministers that attended the Olympic Games in my capacity as minister responsible for the Francophone Secretariat. While I was there, I met many francophone leaders across the country, including the secretary general of the international francophonie organization, the Premier of Quebec, my colleagues from the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member. [interjections] Hon. member, you have the floor.

**Mr. Rogers:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents from the town of Beaumont would be quite interested to find out why the minister is working so hard on francophone issues at the Olympics.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, the bilingual nature of the games makes it an ideal opportunity to promote Alberta's francophone culture internationally. We were joined by other provinces and territories to participate in initiatives like the Canadian Francophonie Day and the Cultural Olympiad. In fact, Prime Minister Harper's personal envoy on official languages at the games praised Alberta's presence there, and he recognized the participation of Franco-Albertan artists at Alberta House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member. [interjections] The hon. member has the floor.

**Mr. Rogers:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Mr. Minister, I understand that one of your meetings included the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General for B.C. Could you expand on those meetings?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, as you are aware . . . [interjections] Thank you. Thank you. As you are aware, Alberta and B.C. cooperate very, very closely during times of crisis or emergencies. As an example, Alberta is the primary source for co-ordinating a response to major earthquakes in B.C. I took advantage of the time there to discuss other issues, the best practices that we have when it comes to law enforcement, forest firefighting.

#### Energy Efficiency

**Ms Blakeman:** I'm sorry. I didn't know that it was puffball day. [interjections] I didn't know. I didn't get the memo.

Energy efficiency is an essential step towards achieving Alberta's emission targets and the most effective means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from a cost perspective. Guys, it's low-hanging fruit. To the Minister of Environment: will the minister include a minimum standard of EnerGuide 80 for all new home construction going forward into the energy efficiency legislation?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, in the words of the member opposite, it's puffball day. I'll hit one out of the park for her. The issue is not for the Minister of Environment to make that decision. I advise the minister responsible, who is the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

2:10

**Ms Blakeman:** You're supposed to be guiding this government in environmental policy.

Question 2 to the same minister: given that energy efficiency in homes increases property values while significantly benefiting our environment, will the minister include mandatory third-party energy efficiency labelling of new homes in the energy efficiency legislation or talk to his friend about it?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a myriad of opportunities that we have to incent and enhance the degree of energy efficiency. That is the responsibility and the role of the Minister of Environment, to point those opportunities out; in fact, to urge caucus to adopt those. But I think it would be presumptuous in the extreme for me to tell this member that I can promise something that is not within my jurisdiction to implement.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, why doesn't the minister share with us exactly what he is doing to get his colleague to implement this legislation? There's a puffball for you. Go ahead. Hit it out of the park.

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, we have initiated an interdepartmental committee that is responsible for reviewing all things related to the



building code and other matters with respect to energy efficiency. That will then drive towards a recommendation that comes forward not only from Environment but from Municipal Affairs, from other ministries, not the least of which is Treasury Board because some of this will involve public dollars. At that point in time we will make a decision, and I'll be more than happy to advise the member what it is.

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

#### Children and Youth Services Workforce

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we heard during the introduction of guests this afternoon, next week is National Social Work Week. Social workers are extremely important members of our communities. Many of them work to help keep children and youth safe and to ensure that families have access to the supports and services that they need to build on their strengths and overcome their challenges. My first question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I know that government currently has a hiring restraint in place. What assurances can you provide that your ministry is making sure there continue to be the social workers that are needed to serve vulnerable children and families in the province?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know this is a concern of this member. She has spoken with me directly about it, and the member is correct. We have hundreds of social workers that work within our department. They are providing excellent service. I want to assure you, hon. member, that any hiring restraint that you're referring to, the critical front-line positions are going to be filled. My expectation, as I've told you earlier as well, is that any front-line position that becomes vacant will be filled.

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

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second question to the same minister: what initiatives does your ministry have under way to ensure that front-line workers, as you mentioned, including social workers, are able to manage their workloads in a way that allows them to give each child and family they work with the attention that they do need?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say once again that we have great respect for the good work that's being done by our staff on the front line. Staff have brought a very real concern to our attention that relates to workload. That's the extra, it seems like, huge volume of paperwork that they're needing to fill out. How we've addressed that is that we've had staff work with management. They've developed a new software system so that they can manage not only the paperwork but their workload. That's known as the new Intervention Services Information System – you'll be hearing more about that – that's called ISIS.

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

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's very good news.

My final question to the same minister. According to documents released when the budget was announced, there will be a reduction of more than 50 full-time positions at the Ministry of Children and

Youth Services. Could the minister please tell which staff are being laid off and how many of these staff are front-line workers?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I have had this discussion with the hon. member as well, and I've made it very clear that we are not laying off any staff as a result of the budget. Any reduction that was reported in the budget will be achieved through attrition, and front-line positions that are critical to supporting vulnerable children and families, hon. member, will continue to be filled.

#### Number of Provincial Constituencies

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the proposed changes to Alberta's electoral boundaries provide further evidence that the growing pains that we are experiencing in this great province are very real and very evident. The current provincial budget frequently incorporates the term "finding efficiencies." How about this efficiency: keep Alberta's Legislature at 83 seats and save millions. Will the minister consent to doing this?

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

**Ms Redford:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the boundaries commission has provided a report reflecting the current state of the legislation in Alberta. There's much time for public comment, and I'll look forward to what the result might be in the future.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, regarding public comment much of that has already been made to the commission. It was noted in the report that many Albertans really don't want another four MLAs. So how about following the first rule of democracy, listening to these people and not incorporating these four MLAs?

#### Speaker's Ruling Questions about Legislation

**The Speaker:** Well, hon. member, the first rule of democracy is to uphold the laws of the province of Alberta. This Assembly has passed a piece of legislation mandating 87 electoral divisions. Is the hon. member asking the Minister of Justice to not observe the law, to break the law?

I'm sorry. You're going on to your third question, please.

#### Number of Provincial Constituencies (continued)

**Mr. Hehr:** Okay. Here's my third question, then. If that is in fact true, can we put forward some new legislation, then, to keep it at 83 seats so that we don't have another four?

**Ms Redford:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Legislature is open for public business, and if the member wants to introduce legislation, he's certainly entitled to do that.

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

#### Sour Gas Well Safety

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it certainly is Thursday.

As we speak, a gas well in northern Alberta is on fire, threatening the health and safety of people who live nearby. A 1982 fire at

another site killed two people and created a toxic cloud so thick that it hung over Edmonton for weeks. Sour gas wells are a constant threat to those who live around them, and this government is ignoring the threat. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Why is your government putting Albertans' health at risk by ignoring the threats posed by sour gas?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, this particular member in raising the question the way he did is, I would say, irresponsible at best. We have got one of the world-renowned agencies, the Energy Resources Conservation Board, on-site with seven monitoring units which say that there is zero odour. Zero. It is not sour gas. There is no sour gas being detected in the area. So I would suggest that the member might want to tone down his rhetoric and ask a responsible question, and I'll try and give him a responsible answer.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, deflecting responsibility onto the ERCB is a cop-out. That body is an industry lapdog designed to approve and expedite requests from the oil and gas industry. The fact is that this well could have been a sour gas well, and technically it was expected to be. [interjections] Laugh all you want, but there are sour gas wells affecting thousands and thousands of Albertans all around this province. They're dangerous to their health, and the government is doing nothing about it. Why doesn't the minister simply admit that they don't care about the health and safety of those Albertans because they just keep putting . . .

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

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I won't admit it because it's absolutely false.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, all over the province sour gas wells cause fear and anxiety among families who live nearby. They have sour gas wells in both Edmonton and Calgary in residential areas. People are bombarded with the smell of hydrogen sulphide every day. Even small levels over time can lead to major health problems. Albertans should not be forced to live with these fears because the government will not stand up to industry. Why won't this government end the approval of sour gas wells that are in close proximity to the homes where Albertans raise their families?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, this member in raising his first question said that it must be Thursday, and he's right. It absolutely is Thursday. I think that is best exemplified by the absolute baloney in the preamble to his question.

2:20

### Integrated Traffic Units

**Mr. Marz:** Mr. Speaker, my questions today are to the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, who didn't get to go to the Olympics. Recently the minister announced that Alberta traffic sheriffs and RCMP traffic services would be integrated into new traffic units in 19 locations throughout the province. This new model is based on pilot projects held in 2009 in Whitecourt, Airdrie, Wetaskiwin, and Olds. I'm somewhat puzzled to see that the units are being established in Innisfail when right next door in Red Deer another unit is stationed and the next one located south in Airdrie. My question to the Solicitor General is: would it not be more feasible to have a more central location between Red Deer and Airdrie such as Didsbury or Olds?

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

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I did not get to go to the Olympics.

Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to 19 integrated sheriff and RCMP traffic units that are going to be deployed across our province. Of particular note, four of those units, based in Leduc, Ponoka, Innisfail, and Airdrie, are dedicated to freeway traffic in the QE II corridor, and they are reasonably spaced along that corridor.

**Mr. Marz:** Again to the same minister: who made the decision on where to locate these traffic units?

**Mr. Oberle:** Mr. Speaker, that was and is a decision best left to the people that plan such things, the operational officers involved, in this case the integrated planning team between the RCMP and the sheriffs.

**Mr. Marz:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it would seem to me that a more central location could save on things like fuel costs as well as improve the response times to accidents on the QE II between those locations. Were these issues not considered in this decision?

**Mr. Oberle:** Mr. Speaker, I believe all factors were looked at in the decision-making process. We had to consider traffic volumes, collision data, and areas with the greatest number of highways and roadways. If I could refer the hon. member to my first answer, those four traffic divisions dedicated to the freeway corridor are reasonably well spaced along it.

Thank you.

### Nortel Pension Protection

**Mr. Chase:** Mr. Speaker, world-wide economic conditions have impacted all Canadians, but they've had dire consequences for a group of former Nortel employees living in Alberta whose LTD and pension benefits were cut off when Nortel collapsed. To add insult to injury, the federal government permitted the sale of Nortel's assets without guaranteeing employee compensation as a precondition. To our EI minister. Ontario is the only province with a pension benefits guarantee fund that's funded entirely by corporate contributions. Will the minister commit to similar measures in this province to protect vulnerable Albertans?

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always horrible when a situation like this occurs and workers and their families are left without income.

I have to say two things. Number one, it's very rare for it to occur in Alberta. I must say that my provincial counterparts as early as the beginning of this week have raised this issue at our federal-provincial-territorial meeting to the federal minister. It is squarely a federal matter, so if there is any provincial overlay, I would suggest the member direct his subsequent two questions to our minister of finance.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. To whoever wishes to answer, I am pleased to hear that these discussions are occurring. The effect is going to be felt in Alberta because we'll be picking up the pieces. Since Nortel's bankruptcy proceedings began, what efforts has the ministry

made to ensure that the federal government amends the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to provide protection for employees affected by corporate bankruptcy? The hon. minister of finance would be fine.

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I would have assumed the hon. member would know, both of Nortel's pension plans are registered in Ontario and regulated by the Ontario superintendent of pensions. That's because of their location of Ontario. There is a federal dimension as well. We have been in touch, as the other minister has indicated, with the feds, but this is largely outside of our jurisdiction.

**Mr. Chase:** What I'm hoping is that this government will stand up for Alberta's former Nortel employees who are being directly affected by the bankruptcy. It's our problem now, and working with the feds is part of the solution, but we have to come up with a made-in-Alberta solution as well.

Mr. Speaker, the Ontario government has promised former Nortel employees that the first \$1,000 of their monthly pension payments will be guaranteed, and Quebec offered some pension protection to Nortel retirees in October of 2009 . . .

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

**Dr. Morton:** Well, again, Mr. Speaker, it's not surprising that Ontario has done this since both of the Nortel pension plans are registered in Ontario and regulated by Ontario. I would tell the hon. member and the House that the Alberta superintendent is consulting with Alberta Justice currently as to whether or not we would have the opportunity to intervene in the March 3 hearing about the Nortel settlement and, if we can, to possibly object to that.

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

#### Inner-city Urban Renewal

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Increased density; increased diversity, including a growing immigrant population and an urban aboriginal population; increased crime levels; decreased home ownership; aging infrastructure; closure of schools; increased commuter traffic; increased property taxes; and a congregation of social facilities are all problems that are facing the urban inner-city communities in my constituency. Does the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs have a strategy in place to address the need for urban renewal and revitalization as a result of these changes in our inner-city communities?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for that question. I particularly appreciate it given the fact that I also represent an inner-city community. One such strategy that we employ is the capital grant program. This creates partnerships with nonprofits, municipalities, and the private sector as well as other levels of government and also stakeholder engagement. Both of these types of plans ensure that there is always local input in any decisions that we make. They also cost less money than if the government would simply do it alone.

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Urban areas may very well benefit from a program similar to the rural development fund, which focuses on both physical capital and building a sense of community. As well, the state of Idaho has an urban renewal law, which assigns powers to urban renewal agencies. My next question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Do you see any potential for allocating issue-based funding and decision-making powers to collaborative partnerships, that include certain municipalities such as Calgary and Edmonton, various provincial ministries, and community-based organizations, for urban renewal?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, in Alberta the responsibility for urban renewal rests with the individual municipalities. These municipalities are required to give notice of intention to prepare plans and provide opportunities for input. The level of involvement between the municipality and the community group is virtually at the discretion of that individual municipality.

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. The second part of his ministry's mission is to assist urban communities in addressing their unique needs. My question is: will he commit to this Assembly to advocating amongst his cabinet colleagues for greater awareness about the challenges of urban inner-city communities before these communities lose hope?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member raises an important point, the fact that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach. What may work for his inner-city community may not work for mine. That's why, again, we are going through these partnerships with the local areas here.

A couple of weeks ago I attended phase 1 of the Boyle Street renaissance in Edmonton. That's a great example of partnerships that revitalize the community. We look at neighbourhood renewal, but again it's on an individual, case-by-case basis, realizing that one size does not fit all.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

#### Food Production Land Use

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I didn't get a chance to go to the Olympics either.

This week the Edmonton city council passed their municipal development plan, which included a section on food and urban agriculture. The local food industry has a significant impact on the economy, environment, social, and cultural growth in urban areas. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Sustainable food systems will be a defining aspect of our urban areas in the future. Has the minister incorporated this into long . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. minister, you can proceed.

**Mr. Hayden:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am indeed pleased that the member opposite is such a supporter of the local food industry because, of course, it's hugely important to our province's economy.

It is one area of agriculture that we've seen the greatest increase, 30 per cent, in our farmers' markets over the past couple of years. The products and the variety that they're producing and that they're showcasing around the world now are available right here in Alberta, and I hope people take advantage.

**Ms Pastoor:** The expansion of urban areas has led to dramatic losses of prime agricultural land, yet this is not the focus in the land-use framework. What is the minister doing to address this issue?

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

**Mr. Hayden:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I recall rightly, I believe about 4 to 5 per cent of the provincial land base is urban settings. Unfortunately, one of the problems with that is that around these centres is some of the best soil that we have in our entire province. But the markets continue to increase around our urban centres for products and things that are being brought in, so people can do that shopping within a hundred kilometres.

2:30

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. That's the urban side of it, but I still think we have to protect our agricultural land. Will the minister introduce initiatives to encourage municipalities to include food and urban agriculture as a central aspect of the development plans?

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

**Mr. Hayden:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a past municipal politician I would expect that the member opposite would understand that land-use issues are issues that are at the local level. It's their responsibility. I expect that they do very much consider at their tables the highest and best use for land and try to make their decisions based on good information.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

#### **Immigrant Nominee Program**

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Mr. Minister, funding for the immigration program has dropped substantially this year. Is this government abandoning its commitment to bringing new immigrants to this province and to programs like AINP?

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it is true that funding in that line item has dropped in my budget from \$74 million to \$65 million but mostly because of the fact that there was one-time federal funding of \$6 million in that budget line, which is no longer available. Let me be clear to the member: immigrants have played a vital role in not only the social but the economic development of this province since 1905, and they will continue to play an important role.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. Even with one-time funding it still looks like there's a budget reduction. What are you cutting, and how will it impact our ability to get the people we need?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, naturally in this economic climate there is a lowered requirement for foreign workers, be it trained, skilled, or unskilled, so our department will not be as active on the foreign markets assisting employers in attracting workers to this province. However, having said that, we will continue Alberta's presence in foreign markets because I and my colleagues in cabinet are optimistic. We know that the economy will recover, and we will continue to need immigrants in the future.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: what about programs for immigrants who are already here? Can they be confident that they will continue to be supported?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, they can be very confident. We will continue to focus our efforts on the settlement of immigrants who are already here. For instance, programs like English as a second language will continue to be offered in various modes. Some 17,000 clients, immigrants, will be receiving those programs in Edmonton and Calgary alone. The settlement of immigrants right now will become one of our focuses while we still keep active in foreign markets but at a reduced level.

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

#### **Royalty Framework** (continued)

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In estimates last week I asked the Minister of Energy whether he thought a recent survey of businesses which found Alberta to be the least competitive place in Canada for oil and gas development was fair. The minister replied that because the report was from the small "c" conservative Fraser Institute, it was likely skewed. Well, yesterday the University of Calgary released their report stating that Alberta is, indeed, the least competitive place in Canada to produce oil and gas. To the Energy minister: will he now admit that the new royalty framework has been a disastrous policy for this province?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I did read the report by Dr. Mintz. We accept advice wherever we can get advice. Dr. Mintz has made some observations, and as part of our competitiveness review strategy in compiling information, we will certainly use that analysis. What we're doing is much more comprehensive than what the report was yesterday, but we will take that information.

**Mr. Anderson:** Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that this government always wants to move forward; they don't want to look to the past. Well, the past is useful for learning what mistakes to avoid in the future, which is why I find it distressing that the government didn't learn from Pierre Elliott Trudeau's national energy program. They don't understand that when they attack the energy business, regular Albertans suffer. To the minister: why is it taking this government so long to reverse its made-in-Alberta national energy policy? Let's move forward.

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to move forward, and we are moving forward. You know, as I pointed out in this House one time – and the member may not have been here because it might have been before he was elected. You know, there's a country music song, *No Future in the Past*. I think that's where the member might be living. We are moving forward and look forward to the report.

**Mr. Anderson:** Well, he can tell that to my family and friends who are still looking for work in the energy sector thanks to this government's ridiculous energy decision.

One of the bewildering things I can't get my head around to this day is why on earth this government would call a competitiveness review and consult with industry after announcing the royalty framework overhaul. To the minister: why didn't this government ask the energy industry for input first, before making such an extreme policy decision involving our most important industry? How could it be so incompetent?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member is trying to leave the impression that somehow this is Saskatchewan in the '70s. As the Premier pointed out earlier in a response to a question from his equally ill-informed colleague sitting next to him there, there is large investment going on in this province today, lots of it in the oil sands. You know, in the last month we have had literally record land sales. That is confidence in this economy, in conventional oil and gas.

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

#### Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of the past, in 1974 my father stood in this House and raised concerns that wildfowl were dying on the tailings ponds. Thirty-six years later these tailings lakes have grown to 50 times their original size. The minister's answer for the existing ponds is: this will take some time. Will the minister admit that the time for politely asking for cleanup has long passed and it's time to use your full authority to actually make it happen?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing. We've issued directives, that will be enforced, that will require significant reductions in the use of tailings ponds and eventually will lead to their elimination.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the existing projects are not complying with the government's performance criteria at this point. Now, next week is the start of the trial against Syncrude for their role in the death of over 1,600 ducks on their tailings lake, and of course we know this is only a fraction of the devastation experienced by wildlife as a result of these toxic lakes. How can the minister stand by while companies continue to lakefill dangerous chemical waste without imposing any consequences?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, we do not stand by. I just advised the member that we have in fact issued directives that will lead to the elimination of tailings ponds. But this member seems to live in a world where you can suddenly make a decision today and change 25 years of history by tomorrow. It takes time.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it would have been really nice if they'd made a decision 36 years ago because that's when they were

first warned. Now when asked to do the right thing, all they say is: eventually it will happen. I'm going to ask a clear question asking for a clear timeline, and I hope I can get a clear answer because I really don't want my kids to be having to ask this question 36 years from now. Will this government commit to eliminating the existing lakes of poison sludge within 20 years and to exercising all authority necessary to make sure it happens?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, when someone frames a question with such broad parameters and then wants a yes or no answer, it's about impossible to do so. The fact of the matter is that we have directives in place. There will be significant changes. In fact, I would suggest that within 20 years there will be in place technology that no longer requires tailings ponds. Will the existing ponds be eliminated by then? I cannot predict the future. I guess this member has some kind of power that is beyond me.

2:40

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today and until March 8, I believe. There were 107 questions and answers today raised by 18 different members, 12 on the Official Opposition and opposition side and six by the private government members' caucus.

We will continue the Routine in 30 seconds from now, but just let me leave you one thought – okay? – please, as you depart in the next 30 seconds. Vancouver is one hour and 10 minutes from the Edmonton International Airport. There is no greater show going on in the world: the Canadian Olympics in Vancouver.

**Mr. Boutilier:** It's \$69 on WestJet.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member points out that it's a \$69 airfare. Anybody can go.

#### Members' Statements

(continued)

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to my guests for staying until I could do my member's statement.

#### Today Violence Help Centre

**Ms Blakeman:** A collaborative help centre for people impacted by family violence: this short description is on the letterhead of the Today centre, a concise and apt description of the vision and mandate of this new centre in downtown Edmonton. I first heard of this idea when it was a twinkle in the eye of some established NGOs, the Edmonton Police Service, and three levels of government who wanted to take the next step in service delivery in this critical area of family violence. Along with many others I attended the partnership celebration event in January, which let us see what they had been up to since doing a soft opening in November 2009.

This is a community-based centre dedicated to changing the cycle of family violence through co-located staff and linked community services. Their vision is of a healthy community safe and free from family violence. This collaborative community includes the John Howard Society, the Edmonton Police Service, Catholic Social Services, Aboriginal Consulting Services of Alberta, the RCMP, the city of Edmonton community services, and Alberta Children and Youth Services.

These organizations recognize the obstacles of long waiting lists for assistance and financial constraints. They have organized to be easily accessible and to work together to meet the needs of those seeking help regarding domestic violence. I was particularly struck by the space provided for smaller NGOs to come in and work with clients so that a small immigrant women's organization could come and meet their clients there or bring them and, literally, walk them from room to room to connect with the many organizations and services offered there.

The Today centre is striving to increase accountability from those who perpetrate violence, reduce repeat victimization, increase the level of reporting of family violence, enable the active participation of clients in their movement to a safer, healthier life, and reduce the harm caused by violence.

Congratulations to Patrick Dillon and to all of the staff and the agencies who brought this idea to a reality. We welcome you and thank you.

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

### First Nations Education Agreement

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of us know that a significant academic achievement gap exists between First Nations students and all other students in the province. This is unacceptable. However, yesterday was a great day, a day for celebration because it marked a new beginning for aboriginal education in this province.

Under the leadership of the Minister of Education, the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, the previous Minister of Aboriginal Relations, and three grand chiefs of Alberta a memorandum of understanding on First Nations education was signed which has as its goal strengthening, learning, and educational success for First Nations students. This was done at a signing ceremony at the Tsuu T'ina First Nation junior and senior high school west of Calgary.

Perhaps most importantly, Mr. Speaker, this memorandum of understanding signifies that all parties recognize the importance of education to all our children, our families, our community, and the greater society. Every student in Alberta deserves to receive the best possible education regardless of where she or he lives and regardless of his or her background.

This MOU will provide a framework for collaboration and will support a range of education-related initiatives, including parental and community engagement, treaty and cultural awareness, and ongoing work on tuition and education service agreements. It provides a framework to guide the transformation of First Nations education in Alberta.

The key highlights include the establishment of an indigenous knowledge and wisdom centre, which for the first time will create a centre of education expertise for all the First Nations and the three treaty organizations; a commitment to develop a long-term strategic plan for First Nations education in Alberta to improve First Nations student outcomes; and a creation of the Alberta First Nations education circle comprised of senior officials from all parties to oversee the implementation of the MOU. It was a profoundly moving event incorporating the finest of First Nations traditions such as music, dance, oratory, and, of course, food.

The chiefs who were all involved thank you for being leaders. Chief Keenooshayo said: I hope this marks the beginning of a true treaty partnership that, among other things, provides us the opportunity to ensure ever-increasing knowledge for our children. Let's realize his vision.

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

### National Social Work Week

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today and recognize March 1 to 7 as National Social Work Week. Established by the Canadian Association of Social Workers, this special week honours the valuable contributions of social work professionals and the positive difference they make in the lives of others.

Albertans are aware of and support the critical role social workers have in our province, and they recognize that much of their good work happens behind the scenes. Social workers are heroes in our communities, much like firefighters, police officers, and paramedics. They often deal with complex situations involving vulnerable Albertans, ensuring that children and youth are safe, that people with disabilities receive assistance, and that families get the support they need to stay strong and together.

Each and every day social workers help create a brighter future for the people of this province. They embody the Alberta spirit of compassion, courage, and commitment as well as the Premier's vision of making this province the best place to live, work, and raise a family. Our government is privileged to have many of these skilled and dedicated professionals as employees and as partners.

During National Social Work Week I encourage all Albertans to take the time to show their appreciation and say thanks to social workers in their community. The small effort of saying thank you can have benefits far beyond the value of the moments involved. A thank you can motivate, validate, and give positive reinforcement. We cannot afford to not say thank you frequently and graciously to those who do so much for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Inner-city Communities

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Calgary-North Hill includes a number of established inner-city communities. These communities have a very diverse composition, from new infill owners, renters, and long-term residents to a high proportion of seniors and new families. To say that these communities aren't homogenous is an understatement, and that's what makes them unique. However, many of these communities are struggling to develop an identity as they go through the natural changes of mature communities.

Many of my constituents believe that the identity of their community is changing but not in a positive way. A number of concerns have been sent to my office regarding the siting and development of social facilities such as group homes, rehabilitation and recovery facilities, affordable housing complexes, and shelters. Overwhelmingly my constituents are concerned that their communities are being used as dumping grounds for these facilities without substantial and prior consultation. They're concerned that both the government of Alberta and the city of Calgary are too focused on sacrificing the livability of their communities to address the very real challenges of a growing metropolitan centre.

Mr. Speaker, residents have invested their entire lives in these communities as well as a portion of their savings through paying higher property taxes and deserve a say in how their communities evolve. My communities are committed to supporting our most vulnerable, and we all share in that responsibility equally. We also have the responsibility towards municipalities and communities to ensure that funded projects do not disrupt the established and evolving identity of communities and that funding approvals include

consultation requirements with the communities' elected representatives, officials, and community groups.

Mr. Speaker, these projects will only be successful if the communities that they reside in buy into them. This must be a clear objective of siting these facilities. We strive to have strong communities in this province, and communities are strongest when their residents feel like they have a say and ownership of how the community evolves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### School Closures

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Chronic underfunding of schools is once more leading to plans for school closures in Alberta for the fall of 2010. Some of these are in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Instead of school jurisdictions being able to make decisions on the basis of educational value, they're pushed to make decisions for financial reasons that are bad for the education of our children and youth.

2:50

Excellent facilities have been built in communities like Eastwood, Parkdale, and McCauley here in Edmonton. Excellent, dedicated staff have chosen to work at these schools to assist children to achieve educational success. Formulas imposed by the province make it especially difficult for schools with small enrolments. Yet often these schools are located in mature communities and have more students with higher needs, including children from new immigrant families. These schools often have a strong community atmosphere and provide innovative and effective places where children achieve success. When a nearby school closes and more travel is necessary, students and parents face more obstacles. In more distant, larger schools children face larger classes and a more impersonal environment, adding to their learning challenges.

School closures are mostly happening in old neighbourhoods, which makes municipal revitalization efforts more difficult. One of the most important criteria for a young family in deciding where to live is the proximity of schools. Neighbourhoods that are mature will continue to deteriorate if they do not have schools to attract the next generation to make their homes there.

Two days ago the annual implementation plan from the superintendent of Edmonton public schools was released. It includes a sectoral review which puts 76 schools in established neighbourhoods at risk of closure. Mr. Speaker, this has to stop. Funding education that reduces the chance for lower income children is wrong. Forcing the closure of inner-city schools contributes to urban decay. The Alberta NDP will keep demanding a commitment to education that puts children first.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Notices of Motions

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the House that on Monday, March 8, 2010, we will deal with Motion for a Return 9.

### Introduction of Bills

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

### Bill 7

#### Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be here today to speak to the introduction of Bill 7, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010.

The amendments were developed in co-operation with the office of the Chief Electoral Officer and in response to the recommendations for improvement made by that office. Bill 7 will update and streamline how provincial elections are prepared for and held. We wanted to ensure that changes would improve the elections process while maintaining the integrity of the elections system, and Bill 7 does that.

Under Bill 7, Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer will appoint returning officers instead of asking government to appoint them, making the appointment process less time consuming and eliminating any perception of political involvement.

Bill 7 would also change the process for hiring enumerators. Under Bill 7 returning officers would personally hire enumerators under the direction of the Chief Electoral Officer, eliminating the need to get recommendations from constituency associations.

Bill 7 also includes amendments that broaden investigative powers of the Chief Electoral Officer and open advance polls to those who for any reason want or need to vote early. The amendments also give Albertans who are prisoners the right to vote. This amendment is necessary due to a Supreme Court of Canada ruling.

Third-party advertising legislation will also be improved through Bill 7, ensuring that Albertans who wish to engage in political advertising are able to while ensuring that the public can see who is sponsoring the advertising.

In addition, this legislation increases safeguards for the list of electors and updates the type of information voters can present at polling stations.

To keep Alberta up to date with the latest technological advances, Bill 7 provides a mechanism for the Chief Electoral Officer to explore the use of new voting technologies.

Bill 7 does not address fixed election dates or allowing Albertans to vote at any polling place in any electoral division because of the logistical challenges with that.

Leadership campaign financing rules are also not included in Bill 7, Mr. Speaker. I will be asking the chair of the policy field committee on Public Safety and Services and request the committee to initiate a review and make recommendations regarding financial disclosure rules for leadership contestants for political parties.

This legislation deals with fundamental democratic principles, Mr. Speaker. With Bill 7 we have achieved a balance between updated and streamlined processes and maintaining the integrity of the democratic system.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

### Bill 203

#### Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 203, the Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010.

The objective of this bill is to improve transparency of local access fees and franchise fees by creating a standardized methodology for their calculation using a formula that's easy to compare

across jurisdictions. Bill 203 will not impose restrictions on the amount of money that municipalities can generate from these fees nor require them to even impose these fees at all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a memorandum that I have sent to the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services. This memo is indicating that pursuant to Standing Order 52.07 I am requesting that this particular standing committee inquire into and report on the issue of financial disclosure rules for leadership contestants and thus make recommendations for consideration of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table two separate documents, and I have the requisite copies here. One is a good neighbour agreement between the Fresh Start Addictions Centre and the Highland Park Community Association and the Thorncliffe Greenview Community Association regarding a facility that has received provincial funding that will be in place in that community.

The second one is also a good neighbour agreement between the McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association and the Triwood Community Association for a 24-unit apartment building offering affordable housing options for young adults which resides in the Triwood community in my constituency of Calgary-North Hill.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the cover page of an online petition created by an Albertan named Teresa Woo, who is passionate and who is watching us from home right now, as far as I know. When Teresa heard about a possible treatment for multiple sclerosis, she started this petition, and it gained over 10,000 signatures in just a few months. Teresa says: "The people signing this petition are angry and frustrated because our government is not approving this treatment. Those of us with MS are desperate to have this procedure available because if it's a cure or even close, it would be worth it. If we got only half of our mobility back, it is worth a try." The petition can be found by going online at [www.gopetition.com](http://www.gopetition.com) and searching for the Zamboni procedure.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today on behalf of constituents, and I have received permission from both to do this. The first is from Diane Brouwer, who lives on 82 Street in our constituency. She would like to see funding maintained to our education programs and system.

And also Rosa Bruno, who lives on 86 Street. She would also like to see education funding be maintained and that there be no cuts whatsoever.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of documents showing how the tailings ponds in northeastern Alberta have grown since the 1970s. The first document is an excerpt from a report published in the *Open Conservation Biology Journal* in 2009, which includes figures on the size of the tailings ponds. The other is a series of satellite images from Environmental Defence Canada. This information relates to the questions of my colleague the representative of Edmonton-Strathcona today.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Edmonton public school board's annual implementation plan for 2010-11, which was made public this week. It shows that many schools in the inner city are in danger of being forced to close as the number of schools in Edmonton's suburbs expand.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it being 3 p.m., I must now advise under Standing Order 7(7) that it is 3 p.m., and the daily Routine is deemed to be concluded.

3:00

### Orders of the Day

#### Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

##### Bill 5

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

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

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. It's going to be interesting. Last night we had a good, frank discussion on this year's budget on the fourth floor in the Annex with the hon. minister of finance. Now we're back here this afternoon with Bill 5 for this current fiscal year, which is ending, and it's sort of the hon. President of the Treasury Board's annual allowance.

Certainly, there are valid reasons for some of these expenditures. The details of those expenditures have been debated and discussed as this bill has gone through the Assembly. Whenever we look at supplementary supply estimates over the last number of years – and this goes back to, certainly, a time when the hon. President of the Treasury Board was occupied at other things – it's startling to realize that in the last 11 years, going back to 1999-2000, the total additional money requested through supplementary supply is \$15 billion. That averages well over \$1 billion, about \$1.3 billion a year over the last 11 years. Ironically, that's the same amount of money, that we know about, that Alberta Health Services has racked up in budget deficits since they were created on the fly.

Now, if one was to look at this province's and this government's budgeting capabilities from a distance and you were to see this \$15 billion number, I think there would be reasons for concern. Those reasons could be, Mr. Speaker, any number of things. People could ask: "How come they can't budget? How come they can't stick to a budget? Why is it that every year they seem to have to go back and on average request an additional \$1.3 billion in expenditures?"



Now, we're looking at advanced education. It's the first item, Mr. Speaker. We're looking at \$178 million here. We open today's paper and we see where there is concern over at NAIT that there could be a tuition increase. Many members of this Assembly met with various student groups and student leaders in the past couple of weeks to hear their issues, their concerns. Whether a student is at NAIT or Grant MacEwan or at the University of Alberta or the University of Lethbridge or the University of Calgary, they all have concerns about the cost of postsecondary education. These concerns are valid. They're certainly not going away.

We discussed this in a small amount of detail, Mr. Speaker, during the debate that was previously held on Bill 1, on this competitiveness review or whatever is going to be initiated through that mysterious little unnecessary bill. We don't have, when you compare us to other jurisdictions across the country, a large number of students attending our postsecondary institutions. I don't know whether cost is a factor in this. I'm sure the hon. minister of advanced education is thinking: oh, well, we just went through a large economic expansion and boom, and there were jobs for all regardless of whether they attended a postsecondary institution or not, and that would be the reason for our attendance rates being so much lower than other parts of the country.

Regardless of whether it's tuition or capital maintenance and renewal, higher deferred maintenance costs than expected, the changes in student loans and how we're going to apply those changes, there are certainly some concerns around the Advanced Education and Technology budget. Now, there are a lot of things that we could do to ensure that core government services are protected. We had a discussion on this last night in the finance estimates debate, and I would encourage all hon. members to have a look at that debate. It was certainly interesting, to say the least.

Now we go through Culture and Community Spirit, and we look at Employment and Immigration. With this amount of \$176 million coming forward, with each respective quarterly update that this government issued, whether it was the second quarter or the third quarter, you could see as the recession lasted that there was certainly a need for money to support those whose EI benefits had exhausted or whose savings had exhausted because, unfortunately – and some members talked about it earlier in question period – the recession was deeper and longer in this province than the government had anticipated. Those amounts in Employment and Immigration certainly are not unexpected if you were looking at the quarterly updates because it seemed to be going up and up and up.

We look at Health and Wellness, and this is always an interesting budget. There doesn't seem to be any attempt at trying to control spending. We are spending more and more money and getting less and less from this government. It's clear that this government cannot manage health care, Mr. Speaker. They're grasping now at the private delivery of health care services. They're hoping that will work. Certainly, whenever you compare us to other jurisdictions, it doesn't seem to have helped. It helps people with very thick, fat wallets and lots of money in their bank accounts, but for the majority of citizens it certainly does not.

We look at some of the moves that have been made by Alberta Health and Wellness, and here we are asking for in this fiscal year an additional \$243 million. If you go back to the annual report last year – you can pick volume 1 or volume 2 – you can go through it and can see where some of this money has been spent, not all of it. When we consider how quickly Alberta Health Services was set up and the regional health authorities were disbanded and we look at the role that the former Capital health authority had played in health care delivery in this province and how that role was recognized not only nationally but internationally, it was recognized as a leader in

not only health management but also in the delivery of programs and services.

Now, Capital health had very little difficulty balancing their budget, or if they were over budget, it was by a very, very modest amount. But for many of the officials that were working so hard for Capital health, I don't know what role, if any, they are playing in the new Alberta Health Services Board. I was surprised at how silent so many of the government MLAs were when all this happened and Alberta Health Services was set up and the officials at Capital health were told thanks but no thanks. Many of the accounts that were – they weren't full of money, Mr. Speaker, but certainly there was money available as a result of the prudent management. That money was used, at least part of it, to operate Alberta Health Services across the province.

3:10

The Official Opposition asked a lot of questions about where that money went, but we didn't receive any answers. I must say that I was so disappointed in the government members when they failed, in my view, to come to the defence of the Capital health region when it was at the mercy of this new board and this new direction that was initiated as a result of a memorandum that was signed between the former minister of health, the board of Alberta Health Services, as it was at that time, and the deputy minister of health at that time as well. I think there were three signatures on that if my memory is correct.

There certainly are a lot of questions around the budgeting and the expenditures at Alberta Health and Wellness, and that's why I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the Leader of the Official Opposition, was right on when he suggested on budget day that we have to have a close examination, an independent examination of the books of Alberta Health Services. I would encourage, particularly, the fiscal hawks over on that side of the House, if there are any left, to please give some consideration to the suggestion from the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Now, certainly, also with this additional allocation of \$243 million, Mr. Speaker, the government, before this bill is passed, should provide the details as to how this money is going to be reported in the next annual report, for the fiscal year that's going to end March 31, 2010.

I know we're going to have a lot of consolidated line items in the budget, when in the past, Mr. Speaker, we could clearly see what was spent on information technology in the Edmonton region, what was spent in Calgary on information technology, what, for instance, was spent for registered nurses in Calgary, what was spent in the capital region for registered nurses, what was spent in Northern Lights on registered nurses or in the David Thompson region. An individual could get a breakdown of all these expenditures, and I don't know how this is going to work with the one new superboard, that just seems to be able to devour billions and billions of dollars in cash without improving any services whatsoever.

When we're asking for this allocation – and it's a significant sum – exactly how is the spending of this money going to be reported when we've made such significant changes with Alberta Health Services? Taxpayers are going to have no idea which part of the province this money is going to go to and why, and I think they deserve an explanation as to how this money is being spent. Whether you liked it or not, if you wanted to go through in detail volume 2 of Alberta Health and Wellness's annual report, you could see how individual regional health authorities were spending the money that was provided to them. You could also see where the bonuses went, where the termination benefits went, who got them and why, what kind of pensions were given out. You could see all

that, but you had to sort of look at the fine print to see it. I know the President of the Treasury Board is going to resolve those issues. At least, I hope he is. There were millions and millions of dollars wasted there, and I have no idea who was watching whenever those contracts were signed.

Now, Housing and Urban Affairs. I believe my colleague from Calgary-Currie had some comments on that earlier. On Municipal Affairs as well I believe the hon. member had a lot to say. At least, he certainly did whenever we had a discussion on Bill 5 in caucus, and I'm sure he had the same remarks here in the Assembly.

Now, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, we're having inventory purchases here of \$8.5 million and a capital investment of \$4.7 million.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I heard a couple of questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Centre called them puffballs.

**Ms Blakeman:** Uh-uh.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Yeah.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Edmonton-Centre. How could I have made that mistake?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre referred to them as puffballs. They were questions concerning the activities in Vancouver.

I agree with the Speaker that it's quite an event. It's a significant event. I was watching it last night. Actually, after budget debates I thought I would watch Sweden and Slovakia play hockey. It was a good game. I was surprised that the Slovaks won. But after it was over, I thought: this is the second time in essentially a generation that western Canada has hosted the Winter Olympics, 1988 in Calgary and now 22 years later in Vancouver. I thought to myself: this is symbolic of the gradual transition of economic and political power to the west. [interjection] And of opportunities as well. The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is absolutely right.

I thought: this is a significant event. In a generation or two historians in this country will mark these events as a sign of the increasing influence in our Canadian Confederation of the western provinces.

Certainly, that was my view after – I would rather think out loud than listen to some of the analysis of the hockey game, actually. I enjoyed the game, but the analysis afterwards was something, Mr. Speaker, to be improved on.

Now, with that being said – I'm sorry I got off topic – I did see in the public accounts under Tourism, Parks and Recreation last year, for the year ended March 31, 2008, a \$120,000 allocation from Sierra Systems, which is a big outfit in Vancouver. I think they're a consulting outfit. They had a contract with Tourism, Parks and Recreation for \$120,000. A year later, for the year ending March 31, 2009, they had, I think, a \$4.4 million contract. In the discussion of this allocation here for Tourism, Parks and Recreation for an additional \$13 million plus, I'm wondering if in the course of debate someone from across the way can tell me if any of this allocation would be going to an outfit like Sierra Systems. I have no idea what they do, but I do know that we're going to be faced with quite a tab in these puffball questions, as my hon. colleague described them today.

Actually, I don't think they were puffballs; they were softballs. This government is trying to soften up the taxpayers so that whenever the final bill comes in for these Winter Olympics and our socializing and our hosting, the taxpayers will not be too irate. I

think we can be, you know, good neighbours and we can be gracious hosts without breaking the backs of the taxpayers here in this province.

What role, if any, did Sierra Systems have in this allocation for Tourism, Parks and Recreation? I certainly would be interested in finding out. I can look forward, I think, to receiving the details from the President of the Treasury Board straightaway, I'm sure.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I think I will cede the floor to another hon. colleague. Transportation, I'm told, has been addressed by other members as well. I just appreciate the time that has been provided to me to get my remarks regarding Bill 5 on the record, and I would certainly encourage the President of the Treasury Board and the minister of finance to look in a lot of different areas that they have not already done so to see if they can get control or, at least, attempt to get control of the wasteful spending that has gone on in this government. I think that if they can control the wasteful spending, we'll go a long way towards balancing our books in this province.

Thank you.

3:20

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I was speaking to this bill in Committee of the Whole, I knew there were a few things that I couldn't find in my notes, and I have located them. I'm aware, now, that in third reading we're speaking to the anticipated effect of the implementation of the bill, and I will try to focus my remarks in that way.

Specifically, one of the ones that I wanted to talk about was what was happening to postsecondary students in this province. It has always puzzled me, right from when I was first elected, this government's sort of schizophrenic relationship with people who are attending postsecondary institutions. I would argue that the effect of the government policy and funding has resulted in less money available for the institutions and higher tuition fees for the students, not only in universities but also in colleges and technical institutes.

Now I hear the government arguing: well, that's okay if tuition goes up because we're going to have lots more bursaries and things available for them. Yet as I look, I don't particularly see that. More specifically, I notice that with the funding amounts available in these various bursaries, largely connected to the fact that we've had a downturn in the stock market and their investment return income was not as flush as they expected, that, in fact, there has not been an inflationary increase in most of these bursaries and grants that are available to students in postsecondary institutions. The effect that I see of what is rolling through from both the '09-10 budget, of which, of course, we're looking at the supplementary supplies today, and also the budget that the government is going forward with is that there are cuts and corresponding tuition increases. In fact, I don't see the corollary, which is the increase in the value of the bursaries and grants.

I noticed as I was reading through some things that there's actually a resolution from the Alberta Teachers' Association to urge the government to increase annually the monetary value of Rutherford scholarships to reflect both increases in student tuition fees and the cost of living as per the Alberta consumer price index. Of course, the Rutherford is the one that's directly connected to high school marks, I think.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Was he a Liberal, that fellow?

**Ms Blakeman:** Rutherford? Yes, he was.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Was he an Education minister?

**Ms Blakeman:** No. He was Premier.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Premier and Education minister.

**Ms Blakeman:** Oh, was he? Oh, okay.

So there is a recognition from an educational association that the Rutherford scholarships have not kept pace with inflation and a request for the government to look to that, but I'm not aware of corresponding increases in any of the other ones.

I think that the anticipated effect of what we're looking at in these supplementary supplies and the choices in policy direction that the government has been working in is that we actually have a double hit on students. We know that the effect of the cuts from the previous administration of Conservative government in the early '90s was that it took students much longer to graduate. Instead of coming out of a three-year arts degree in three years, it's four years or four and a half or even five years, and therefore we didn't get those people into the workforce as quickly. You know, there's an argument that they didn't have the same quality of experience in university or any postsecondary institution because they spent so much more time working.

Certainly, when I went to university, yes, a number of my fellow students worked but not out of desperation, and that's certainly what I'm seeing now. They have to. It has flipped. Instead of, "How much time outside of my school do I have to go and work and supplement the money that I have?" it's now determined the other way around: "How much time do I have left after working to earn enough money to invest in education this year?" The whole focus of a student's life has switched around from education to work with a little education on the side. I'll be very interested to see what the effect is of the policies that the government is instituting now, with even further tuition increases, decreases in funding directly to the universities so that they're looking for additional funding through a number of sources, and this corresponding lack of increase, inflation-proofing, or indexing in some way of the various bursary and grant programs. That's one observation.

The second one I want to talk about is connected to the introduction and the member's statement that I did today with the Today Family Violence Help Centre that has just opened in Edmonton. For those of you in Calgary that are a little jealous of this wonderful new centre that has opened in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, not to worry, because they are working in Calgary to start one there. Actually, some people from Calgary have come up to tour through the centre that is opened in Edmonton.

The interesting part of this is that I hear the government talk a lot about administrative efficiencies and finding administrative efficiencies. I hear a lot of people talking about the need to reduce the duplication in the not-for-profit sector. We have too many groups, they say, providing services in certain areas. Here is an initiative that is all about, you know, finding administrative efficiencies and housing themselves together in a very accessible place. I've talked to the group about, you know: can you start to keep records of recidivism? If you're able to show that having all of those services grouped together and that somebody coming to you is less likely to go back into a cycle of violence because of the way the services are bundled together, that's a very good thing.

They're doing exactly what the government talks about. The interesting thing is that the organizations are all having to slice off a piece of their operating funding to devote towards the running of that particular facility because there is no direct funding to the facility itself. Here you have all those agencies I talked about: the

RCMP, the city police, Alberta family and youth services. There was an aboriginal consulting organization, John Howard, and Catholic Social Services. You have all of those organizations that are each contributing towards this particular service delivery model, but they're all having to give up some of their operating money in order to fund the actual facility.

I'm concerned about the long-term sustainability of this particular organization. One of the effects that I see from the government's particular policy changes that they have been pursuing under this administration is – well, actually, it's not a change – a continuing lack of understanding about how the not-for-profit sector operates. While the not-for-profit sector has been trying to work in the way the government says they want them to work, there is a lack of corresponding funding models coming from the government to help these organizations do exactly what the government asked them to do. So it doesn't help us if they try these innovative new service delivery systems and can't be successful at it when it was saving money overall because we have a funding model that doesn't understand that one of the pieces needs to be funded differently, and that is the facility model.

3:30

I don't think that was too complicated. Do you understand what I'm talking about? [interjection] Great. Okay. Well, the President of the Treasury Board was with me, and if he got it, then I'm happy. Good. I think this may well be where we want to go. I often push back when people say: oh, there are too many not-for-profits, and they're all delivering the same services. I tend to push back and go: well, not necessarily. Bundling everybody together and ending up with larger and larger organizations to deliver this kind of service isn't necessarily a good thing.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think what the government is experiencing, particularly with the move they've made with Alberta Health Services, is a perfect example of that. I don't know that in the end we're going to be incredibly happy with taking the control away from local decision-making and moving it up the ladder and making that organization huge. I think there's going to turn out to be a longer term effect on how that whole system gets administered. And I would argue in defence of the not-for-profits that they need to guard against that.

But I am very interested that organizations have taken the government seriously and have sought ways to deliver their services better. They're willing to innovate, they're willing to think outside of the box, and they're willing to take into consideration what the government is telling them about a weariness from the government with spending money on the same issue, if I can put it that way, to a number of different organizations. Here we have a bunch of them coming together to try something innovative, so I hope there is support from the government to at least give them long enough to see if the model works because if we end up with funding cut off in the next fiscal year, we'll never know if this worked, and we will have spent a bunch of money to get here. It's got to run for long enough to see if we actually get the stats back that tell us it's a good model. So that's the second thing I wanted to talk about, the choices that I see being made here.

The third piece is – and I heard this come up in question period today – what is happening around, well, temporary foreign workers, the issue of the government's assistance to businesses to bring people in to fill particular kinds of jobs that businesses in Alberta, interestingly enough smaller businesses, usually seem to have a hard time getting Albertans or people who are already here to fill, so we

end up going outside of the country. The Philippines is a good example.

I've had a letter – and I'm sure others have had a letter – from a group that's actually operating out of B.C. that offers cleaning services. They can't hire cleaners locally, so they're trying to bring in people from the Philippines, I think. Their issue is that they're puzzled about the pilot project through the – and these are initials; I apologize for that – AINP program, which allows room attendants who are working in hotels to be considered for permanent residency visas. The national occupation code that relates to these room attendants is the same one for light duty cleaners, which is what this group is recruiting, but the program doesn't extend to the cleaners. So they're not eligible for that residency visa under the program, which is a head-scratcher. What's the difference between, you know, cleaning an office and cleaning a hotel room?

I'm finding that it's very difficult to work your way through a logical through-line of how we actually work with temporary foreign workers and inviting people to move to Alberta permanently. Now, I've always believed and my caucus has always believed that if we're going to ask people to come from other countries to work here, to fill jobs that Albertans can't or won't fill, then we should be extending immigration rights to them. I just think, you know, that if we want them here, then give them those rights and privileges. I personally really struggle with the concept of temporary foreign workers because I think it's a form of 21st century slavery, frankly, but it seems to work for a lot of small businesspeople. I represent a lot of small businesspeople. This is the concern they've raised with me, and I'll put it on the record and maybe follow up with a letter to the minister specific to this as to why we end up with these inconsistencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to put those questions on the record, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre: could you provide more details to the House regarding the temporary foreign workers and their plight in this country and the fact that we have a two-tiered system for workers? They do not have the same rights as landed immigrants or Canadian citizens. Do you think we should be ensuring that they have the same rights in the workplace as Canadian citizens or landed immigrants?

**Ms Blakeman:** I'm responding to this from a human rights perspective, but I am puzzled by what I see as, as I said, an illogical through-line from the government policy on these workers. I do see what we're doing as two-tiered. It is to me a form of 21st century slavery in that they are not offered the same rights and protections that are offered to other classes of people; that is, full citizens and people with landed immigrant status here. I'm very uncomfortable as a citizen of this country to not be treating a particular group of people in what I think is a fair way, particularly when things go wrong. When things go right, everybody's happy, right? It's not a problem. It's when things go wrong.

What happens – and this whole issue of agents who bring people in for a certain amount of money, I cannot find a way to think that that's a particularly good idea. Frankly, I think it's preying off of desperate people. I don't know why we allow it, but this is an entrepreneurial society, and we seem to allow that.

I'm more concerned about what kind of protection we offer for people when things go wrong, and we do not offer the same level of

protection and service for when things go wrong. It's complicated, I agree, because you're dealing often with languages that are not English. You're dealing with people that may not be aware of the cultural norms or even what's available. But this just strikes me as very un-Canadian.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Not fair.

**Ms Blakeman:** Not fair. I've never been comfortable with this concept.

Now, clearly, my family are in the trades. They're all working hard. The trades are really struggling with that idea, too, because they want to work. They don't understand if there's an ironworker out of work in Winnipeg, why can't that ironworker come and fill a job in Alberta? Why isn't there an attempt to do that? At the same time none of my family would say that we should treat somebody from another country that's brought in to do a job as badly as we're treating the people that are coming under temporary foreign workers when things go wrong.

I don't know if that answers your question.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is making vague allegations about misconduct against foreign workers, why don't you come forward and bring to my office actual complaints? My job is to make sure that these occurrences don't occur. Standing in the House and talking vaguely about things apparently occurring but not actually bringing forward to my office cases where you can identify to me where these breaches occur – because my role and my commitment is to make sure exactly to fulfill what you're asking for: that workers are treated fairly, that they're on an even playing ground with all other hard-working Albertans, that there is no abuse of foreign workers.

3:40

Unfortunately, if there are instances that aren't reported, I would suggest to you it is your role as a member of this Legislature, as much as it is mine or any citizen's, to report these occurrences. You seem to indicate that you know of them. You seem to be telling me about instances that you know of occurring. If you know that they occur, if you know where they are, why won't you send a letter to the minister and advise us of it so that we can investigate and prosecute and punish any wrongdoers who may be causing harm to any workers?

After all, we're all Albertans. We want to make sure that no one is abused in this province. We want to make sure that when these workers leave, they tell good stories about the province of Alberta and perhaps encourage others to come over here if such is required. But to be rising in the House and talking about hypothetical cases – and I believe they are hypothetical until you show me who they are and where they are or at least give me enough grounds to investigate – is not doing anybody any good.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other hon. members who wish to join the debate?

Seeing none, then I call on the President of the Treasury Board to close the debate.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened carefully to the dialogue, particularly when it was actually relevant to the estimates, and I will respond accordingly to those suggestions that are appropriate.

I want to thank members of the Liberal Party and members of the New Democratic Party who chose to participate in the discussion here. I am surprised, Mr. Speaker, that the Wildrose chose to be totally absent from the debate or chose to not participate. I would presume that means they support the supplementary supply.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 3

#### Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010

[Adjourned debate February 16: Mr. Hehr]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on Bill 3.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, I see this bill as one of stubbornness and archaic concepts. To me it's also a bit of an I told you so. What we are seeing is the government having to come forward and correct archaic language but, mind you, language that they have insisted and persisted in putting into legislation all the way along and up to very recently. The world has moved on. As much as this government likes to talk about moving on, the world moved on. They now are stuck with some language in their legislation that has hindered the actual delivery of the purpose of the legislation.

So here we have two particular ones that are around the Fatal Accidents Amendment Act in that it's using very specific language. One of them, shockingly, is that we still have references – and this does shock us now, but you know in my parents' generation or before that it wouldn't have shocked them at all. There's language that is still in our legislation and in this that talks about illegitimate children. I can't believe that any child would be considered illegitimate. All children are legitimate. But, in fact, this act and the history of where it came from does contain that kind of language, and of course we've got to get rid of it. So there's the archaic language that we would have had in legislation, at one time quite legitimately, that talked about illegitimate children. We're no longer willing to do that. It has to be removed from the legislation. So the obvious thing is that you're going to end up with an amending act like you have in front of you that removes that language.

The second piece of this is a persistence in this government of upholding, I would argue, a fairly archaic concept. Our constitution makes it clear – in fact, Mr. Speaker, our Alberta human rights act also makes it clear – that service is to be delivered with a prohibition against discrimination based on family status or on marital status. That's the other thing that was in this bill in which it talks about very gender-specific roles and assignments like wife, husband, et cetera. It did not take into consideration where the law has moved and where society has moved around what we consider and how we define households, families, and legal unions in our society.

You can no longer say that you'll only offer a service to a man and wife who are married in a legal ceremony. That just doesn't cut it anymore because we also recognize, and all services are now offered to, common-law couples and also to same-sex couples. Now, speaking of archaic language, the government went to some effort to come up with “adult interdependent relationships.” That was the way they wanted to get around actually talking about same-sex relationships. That's the other thing that they're having to correct in this legislation to allow for the fact that this process cannot

be limited to people that are narrowly defined as a traditional husband and wife relationship. So it's adding in the language that allows for present-day reality, frankly.

My colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who is our critic for Justice and the Attorney General, has already spoken to the bill and has indicated that our caucus is willing to support it. Of course, I will vote in favour of it because I approve of what's happening here. I do just get a little frustrated that we could have corrected a lot more of this way back when if this government hadn't fought with its little fingernails scraping the rug in between us as it got dragged into the 21st century in its refusal to acknowledge what was actually going on in our society and its insistence on trying to stick to an old definition of things.

As we went through the Family Law Act, it insisted on defining the same way and making the same mistakes. Again, we're slowly having to go through and change that language as well.

So I'm willing to support the bill. To me it is one of stubbornness, archaic concepts, and an I told you so, but I'm happy to see that we're in fact moving forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I support second reading of Bill 3.

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

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

3:50

### Bill 1

#### Alberta Competitiveness Act

[Adjourned debate February 24: Mr. Bhardwaj]

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

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to stand today in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I'd like to start by thanking the hon. Premier for bringing forward this innovative piece of legislation that would see government and industry come together to create a more competitive and prosperous Alberta.

Alberta, like the rest of the world, has been affected by the recent downturn in the economic climate. All governments have had to change strategies when dealing with such economic turbulence. The difference between Alberta and other jurisdictions is that our fiscal savings have allowed our government to adapt to global economic changes as they occur.

This important piece of legislation will examine ways to further enhance Alberta's competitive advantage and help us promote a more competitive provincial economy. This act will increase collaboration between government, industry, and business. This, in turn, Mr. Speaker, will enhance the ability of all industry sectors to adapt to the evolving new global economic order. The Alberta Competitiveness Act will also increase collaboration between government, industry, and businesses. This will allow an enhancement of Alberta's competitiveness and provide long-term benefits for Alberta families and business.

This government will build on current initiatives that will improve our overall competitiveness. Examples of these initiatives include the Alberta Innovates program, the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, and TILMA, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement that was passed last year. All of these programs give Alberta an edge. Through Bill 1 a strategic approach to competitiveness will be developed, including implementation to measure competitiveness

and an operational plan to improve economic procedures. This collaboration will be led by partnerships under the direction of our esteemed Premier. Mr. Speaker, key ministers and stakeholders will access all areas where Alberta can strengthen its competitive edge.

I believe that Bill 1 will lay the groundwork for a more prosperous economy and benefit all Albertans. The Alberta Competitiveness Act will allow Albertans to construct a greater future while utilizing the initiatives this province already has in place, initiatives like the sustainability fund, which cushions Alberta from the full brunt of any economic downswings. The sustainability fund has allowed Alberta to be in one of the best financial positions compared to anywhere else, any other jurisdiction in North America.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 will let this province continue to build on our strengths and will result in a better quality of life for all Albertans. Albertans have always embraced the challenge to make this province a better place, and Bill 1 is a conduit which will enable this. My constituents and all Albertans will benefit from this innovative legislation. Because of this, I strongly support this bill.

In closing, I would like to again thank the Premier for bringing this bill forward. His leadership and extraordinary commitment to improving the quality of life of Albertans has been remarkable, and it is a privilege to stand behind him and be part of his team.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to stand today in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. This is certainly an important piece of legislation for Alberta today and moving into the future. Much of what we do in this Legislature has more of an impact on future generations of Albertans than it sometimes does currently. I think this is one of them.

Obviously, this legislation is a result of, certainly, the changing circumstances we've seen right across the globe as far as economic prosperity and development. It has been a tough time for many Albertans, whether they be business owners, workers, investors, and families because I really do believe that families do feel the stress of some of the unfortunate situations that have happened in today's marketplace. But we have to be realistic. These aren't things that have happened just to Albertans. Many people right across the world are certainly feeling the squeeze of the global recession.

What this has created is a situation where we as a province can emerge with a clear vision and some goals of where we're going as an economy into the future. Certainly, we've enjoyed a very, very prosperous history in this province, and certainly I'm much more aware of the recent prosperity that we've enjoyed, particularly over, let's say, the last decade. So we need to be able to have a clear vision and some goals for the future prosperity of this province. I think at times it's unfortunate, but times like these allow us to step back and assess that and put in place those visions and those goals moving forward. But we must not forget some of the lessons that we have learned over our history.

I really believe that as the world starts to come out of this economic recession, it's going to be a new global economy out there. The competitiveness of the global economy is certainly shifting. We knew that before going into the recession. The recession has only strengthened our knowledge that it is going to be different. There are going to be new opportunities for business and new opportunities for Albertans to prosper in that new economic order.

Fortunately for our great province we're in a position that's probably not comparable to many right across the world. We've got substantial savings in the sustainability fund to cover our temporary budget shortfalls, that we're incurring right now, and I can tell you that that's unique as compared to many other jurisdictions, particularly in North America, Mr. Speaker.

We also have a heritage savings trust fund that is going to remain intact and untouched throughout this whole time. I know that our Premier has committed to that; the hon. minister of finance has committed to that. I think that's substantial because that is, again, an opportunity for Albertans to take the fortunate prosperity that we have, that is in place, as far as our geological formations in oil and gas plays and to be able to use that not just for Albertans' benefit today but for future generations.

We know that, you know, those are finite resources. We know that the world is changing as far as its carbon plans and that sort of thing, and we know that there could be a possibility sometime in the future that there's going to be less reliance on those traditional carbon sources for energy. We need to make sure that as those revenues could potentially diminish, we have the opportunity to utilize those revenues so that we don't have to raise taxes on Albertans to provide the same services that we're delivering today. So that's very, very important to note that we do have that heritage savings trust fund and, again, that the minister of finance is committed to looking at how we can build that up as we move into more prosperous times.

As well, by having the sustainability fund to cover our temporary budget shortfalls, it allows us to continue to support Albertans in a way that improves their quality of life, that makes Alberta a great place to live and raise a family, Mr. Speaker. This is very, very important, I believe, and it's very much linked and correlated to our competitiveness as it allows us to attract the best people and capital not just because they want to invest here but because they want to live here as well.

The result is that what we're doing right now and what we have done to set us up for right now is that we're facilitating future economic prosperity, again, by supporting quality of life for all Albertans today and for years to come. Bill 1 complements the actions that the government has taken up to this point. It focuses on developing new opportunities for Albertans and their businesses. Alberta already is a safe place to invest, but if we can help businesses to open more doors and to be more competitive as the global economy emerges from this recession, then I think that's a very, very important step to securing the prosperity of future generations of Albertans.

Bill 1 will increase collaboration between government, industry, businesses, and Albertans, and it's going to enhance our understanding of our place in the global economy. I wouldn't hesitate to suggest that our place in the new, emerging global economy is going to be one of a leader, one where people are going to be looking at investing here in Alberta. I know in just hearing some of the stories and the evidence coming back from some of our ministers that have visited Vancouver and met with some very, very key, important global leaders that they are looking at Alberta as a significant place to invest their money as the global economy starts to recover.

4:00

Bill 1 will also embrace opportunities led by industry. I think that what is missing in this is that this is a great opportunity to insist that government alone can't just fix the economy. In fact, government probably has very little to do with fixing the economy. A lot of what's going to drive our future growth is going to be industry and business led. This bill allows the government to be able to do that

and work in collaboration and allows the government to support industry through various strategic initiatives.

The end goal, Mr. Speaker, is to be more competitive in the global economy, and there are all sorts of different challenges and opportunities when it comes to that. The first thing that needs to be accomplished and that this bill does set out to accomplish is facilitating a competitive business environment. Simply, this means maintaining a low tax base and removing barriers to investment in business operations: two things.

This is not industry specific. It's just very basic, fundamental principles to a prosperous economy. Low taxes, which are a cost to business and not only a cost to business but a cost to productivity and a cost to investment, are the first piece of this, to make sure that Alberta is in a position to maintain its position as being a low-tax jurisdiction. Then the second piece is, again, removing the barriers to invest and removing red tape for businesses operating in this province. Again, I think it was pretty obvious from the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, that that's something that this government is committed to, and I believe that Bill 1 is a great example of what our government is going to do, working with industry, to address those issues.

Mr. Speaker, let's not kid ourselves. You know, as much as government getting out of the way by keeping the tax burden low and by reducing regulations and red tape is important, what is also important is that government becomes very strategic in its investments and initiatives when it comes to its industry and economy. Yes, I am going to say this, and there are probably some people that, you know, might raise their eyebrows, but sometimes there is a role for government to play in facilitating new investments in new industries and technologies. Now, I think that government, in doing so, needs to be very, very careful. This is a very fine line, and I'm hoping that Bill 1 is going to address that and sort of set out some parameters and barriers as to where and what and how the government should be involved in partnering with industry. It, hopefully, will determine priorities in collaboration with industry and support them in ways that the government can support them.

An example. If you look at Alberta, Alberta has got a great history. Everybody thinks of Alberta as very, you know, government hands-off business. Yes, we've created that environment, but we've got a great history. The Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority in the 1970s. Okay? Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the exact numbers are, but could you imagine where we would be as a province right now if the government hadn't invested in that? I'm not sure we would be in the enviable position that we are in. The reinvestment of revenues from this conventional industry into unconventional will certainly prolong our economic prosperity and has brought in a whole new opportunity for Albertans to find work and create revenue for the government.

Certainly, I think there are numerous examples. I believe the government was very much involved in the Alberta Energy Company. I can't remember what the exact dates were, but it was very instrumental in creating the Alberta Gas Trunk Line, again a very strategic investment for Albertans, again an investment that Albertans continually will in the future reap the rewards from: greater jobs, more prosperity, higher quality of life.

Bill 1 is going to need to look at where those strategic opportunities are for Alberta. Certainly, there's a lot of work, and it will go and build upon the initiatives that have already been undertaken by this government. Alberta Innovates, Productivity Alberta, and the western economic partnership are all great examples of ideas and strategies that can be fine-tuned and thought of as part of Bill 1. It will exemplify Alberta as one of the most competitive and driven places in the world to do business and will facilitate a common

understanding that Alberta is and will continue to be the best place to live, work, play, invest, and raise a family.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's what we're all here for, to make sure Alberta remains a place for all of those things to happen, that Alberta is a balanced place. At the foundation of that is an economy with a huge amount of opportunities for everybody, no matter what their skill or background is. In order to do that, we need to continue to attract the next generation of entrepreneurs and skilled workers, and they will only come here if Alberta is the best place to live, work, play, invest, and raise a family. We cannot merely react to changing circumstances in the economy as they come up. We need to be proactive, and that is exactly what Bill 1 does.

We are at a pinnacle point in our great province's advancement, with endless opportunities as we emerge from the global economic recession, Mr. Speaker. I am very confident that this bill along with the many other initiatives that this government has undertaken, that have been laid out in the throne speech, is going to lead Alberta into an economy that's brighter and exciting for our kids and their kids. The world is going to be looking at Alberta as a great place, again, like I said, to live, work, play, raise a family, and invest.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Strathcona.

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to stand in support of Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. I'd like to start by thanking the hon. Premier for bringing forward this timely piece of legislation. Since 2008 the global economy has been in a state of uncertainty. The global recession was caused by factors outside of our province but, of course, is still felt by all Albertans.

A large part of our provincial economy is centred on natural gas and oil prices. Fluctuations in the price of these commodities cause fluctuations in our provincial revenue stream during both good and bad periods. To protect against these fluctuations, our government has practised prudent fiscal planning, recognizing that the prosperity that's experienced during the boom periods will not last forever. Under the leadership of our Premier our government has saved during economic peaks, knowing these savings will prove to be of value during our economic valleys.

Over the past few months the global economy has shown signs of recovery. However, the economy is also undergoing profound changes. We want to ensure Alberta is in the best position to respond and adapt to these changes. Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act, recognizes that the global economy is changing and our government must take appropriate measures to ensure that we keep pace with these changes and continue to attract investment to our province.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, favourable business conditions in Alberta have been instrumental in attracting investment in our province. Bill 1 will continue to enhance these favourable conditions, attracting new businesses and innovation.

One way that we can continue to attract business and investment is by evaluating our regulatory framework. By improving this framework, we'll continue to attract investment, new business, and innovation, that play such a large part in our province's success. With an efficient regulation system we'll continue to send a strong message to prospective investors, innovators, and entrepreneurs that Alberta is one of the best places in North America to do business.

Attracting investment and promoting competitiveness in Alberta are vital to both our economy and our quality of life. As a government we should continue to support regulations that enhance economic, environmental, and social aspects of Albertans' lives. Competitiveness breeds a healthy economy. A healthy economy will grow faster. It leads to lower prices. It leads to higher wages. Essentially, a competitive economy ensures that Albertans will continue to enjoy the high standards of living that have characterized our province for decades. Bill 1 will increase collaboration between government, industry, businesses, and Albertans in order to enhance our province's competitive edge. By allowing businesses to operate more efficiently, we are strengthening the bond between government and industry. This leads to enhanced investment and creates a more competitive and affluent Alberta.

Alberta is in one of the best fiscal positions in North America coming out of the economic downturn. Moving forward, it's vital that the Alberta government finds ways to enhance our competitiveness and create a thriving and more diversified economy. This is exactly what Bill 1 proposes to do. The Alberta Competitiveness Act displays the foresight and planning that has characterized the work of our government for years. We were prepared for the global downturn, and with the recommendations that come forward from the partnership formed under Bill 1, Alberta is poised to emerge from these challenging economic times with a stronger, more competitive economy.

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons I am pleased to stand before this Assembly in support of Bill 1. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** We have Standing Order 29(2)(a).

**Dr. Taft:** We do, Mr. Speaker. I would like to exercise my right to that.

I was listening to the comments from the Member for Strathcona. He had a line in there, I think, that was exactly to the effect that competitiveness breeds a healthy economy. My concern with the whole approach to this legislation is that the emphasis is so heavily on competitiveness that we forget some of the other things that also breed a healthy economy. Sometimes – and, actually, the Member for Calgary-North Hill, I think, sort of alluded to this – co-operation breeds a healthy economy, and sometimes competitiveness actually destroys a healthy economy. You've seen that play out on Wall Street. Even people like Alan Greenspan have admitted that unbridled competitiveness has destroyed aspects of the American economy.

My question to the Member for Strathcona would be: wouldn't it be sensible to have, instead of an Alberta Competitiveness Act, an Alberta productivity act? Because, really, sometimes competitiveness leads to productivity. Sometimes co-operation leads to productivity. Productivity is actually easily measured in economic terms. If this act is really about encouraging productivity, then maybe we should amend the act and call it the Alberta productivity act and then build it around the concept of productivity.

**Mr. Quest:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that we want to rename the act, but when we talk about competitiveness and co-operation and collaboration, these things are not all independent of each other. These are interconnected.

Just the reference to Wall Street. I think, you know, what happened with the meltdown and all that sort of unbridled activity, possibly underregulated, another topic, certainly not something that could happen here in Alberta.

I look at competitiveness, obviously, as an environment. It's healthy. We're not talking about cutthroat competitiveness here. I think we're talking about something that's gone on in the world of trade and commerce since the beginning of time. I think of sort of co-operation between competitors in certain things, certainly with respect to research and development and so on. So I don't see one being exclusive of the other. I think we can have a competitive economy or a competitive environment for business and still have co-operation and collaboration all going on at the same time. What we're doing here, again, is trying to continue to create and nurture an environment in this province where all of this competitive economic activity can take place.

Again, for all of those other things, I think that as Albertans, by our very nature, our competition is healthy. I think we work together. I think we work collaboratively. I think we work cooperatively. That's the spirit that built this province, and that's the spirit that will continue to allow us to prosper and grow in the future as a people, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Mr. Benito:** I understand, hon. member, that in the past three months five new oil sands projects have been announced, I think over \$5 billion in new investment. When we say competitiveness, I always relate this idea to job creation. Can you be more specific on how the competitiveness of this province will relate to a job creation program?

**Mr. Quest:** Well, if I understood the question, I think the answer is relatively straightforward. Again, we talked about this competitiveness. A province attracts investment to the province because it's a good place to do business. When it's a good place to do business, investment dollars come here. You mentioned oil sands, and of course investment in oil sands comes from all over the world now. This attracts the dollars to Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move that we adjourn debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we do adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on March 8 pursuant to our standing order.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:18 p.m. to Monday, March 8, at 1:30 p.m.]



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

**Activity to February 25, 2010**

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

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

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

- 1 Alberta Competitiveness Act (Stelmach)**  
First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 4 aft., passed)  
Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 16 aft.), 135-37 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137-42 (Feb. 16 aft.), 257-67 (Feb. 23 aft.), 286-98 (Feb. 24 aft.), 317-20 (Feb. 25 aft., adjourned)
- 2 Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Woo-Paw)**  
First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)  
Second Reading -- 124-25 (Feb. 16 aft., adjourned)
- 3 Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Weadick)**  
First Reading -- 64 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)  
Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 16 aft.), 137 (Feb. 16 aft.), 317 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
- 4 Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Olson)**  
First Reading -- 188-89 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)  
Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft., adjourned)
- 5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2010 (\$) (Snelgrove)**  
First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)  
Second Reading -- 247-49 (Feb. 23 aft., passed)  
Committee of the Whole -- 280-86 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)  
Third Reading -- 312-17 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
- 6 Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Bhullar)**  
First Reading -- 213 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)  
Second Reading -- 280 (Feb. 24 aft., adjourned)
- 7 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Redford)**  
First Reading -- 311 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
- 201 Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2010 (Rogers)**  
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)  
Second Reading -- 213-27 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)
- 202 Mandatory Reporting of Child Pornography Act (Forsyth)**  
First Reading -- 154 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
- 203 Municipal Government (Local Access and Franchise Fees) Amendment Act, 2010 (Fawcett)**  
First Reading -- 311-12 (Feb. 25 aft., passed)
- 204 Fiscal Responsibility (Spending Limit) Amendment Act, 2010 (Anderson)**  
First Reading -- 271 (Feb. 24 aft., passed)

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