



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

Issue 14

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
 Third Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
 Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort, Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
 Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

Ady, Hon. Cindy, Calgary-Shaw (PC), Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation	Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)
Allred, Ken, St. Albert (PC)	Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL)
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)	Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC), Minister of Service Alberta
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (WA), WA Opposition House Leader	Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC), Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)	Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Sustainable Resource Development	Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC), Minister of Energy
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)	Lindsay, Fred, Stony Plain (PC)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs	Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC), Minister of Employment and Immigration
Blackett, Hon. Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC), Minister of Culture and Community Spirit	Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL), Official Opposition Deputy Leader, Official Opposition House Leader	MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)
Boutillier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (Ind)	Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)	Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Leader of the ND Opposition
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)	McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC), Government Whip	McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL), Official Opposition Whip	Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC), Minister of Finance and Enterprise
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Environment	Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), ND Opposition House Leader
Danyluk, Hon. Ray, Lac La Biche-St. Paul (PC), Minister of Infrastructure	Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC), Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)	Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Egmont, (PC), Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, Deputy Government House Leader	Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC), Minister of Transportation
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC), Deputy Government Whip	Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL), Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)	Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)	Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC), Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations	Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC), Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Political Minister for Calgary, Deputy Government House Leader
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)	Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC), Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (WA), WA Opposition Whip	Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC), Minister of Children and Youth Services	Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC), Minister of Municipal Affairs	Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)	Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Groeneveld, George, Highwood (PC)	Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC), Minister of Education, Political Minister for Edmonton, Government House Leader	Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), President of the Treasury Board
Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC), Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development	Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC), Premier, President of Executive Council
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL), Leader of the Official Opposition
Hinman, Paul, Calgary-Glenmore (WA), WA Opposition Deputy Leader	Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Seniors and Community Supports	Tarchuk, Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC), Deputy Premier, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, Minister Liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces	Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Minister of Seniors and Community Supports	VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC)
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development	Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Treasury Board	Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education and Technology
	Webber, Hon. Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC), Minister of Aboriginal Relations
	Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
	Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
	Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Minister of Health and Wellness, Deputy Government House Leader

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Clerk	W.J. David McNeil	Parliamentary Counsel	Stephanie LeBlanc
Clerk Assistant/Director of House Services	Louise J. Kamuchik	Sergeant-at-Arms	Brian G. Hodgson
Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research	Micheline S. Gravel	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	Chris Caughell
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	Gordon H. Munk
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Shannon Dean	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. We give further thanks for the gifts of culture and heritage which we share. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today a visitor who is in your gallery. Stanley Gooch is a Camrosian. He doesn't live there anymore, is now retired and lives in Kelowna, but he was raised in Camrose and has had a distinguished career as a Canadian diplomat. He has served as ambassador to Central America, to Mexico, as Canadian High Commissioner to India, served in Vienna with the atomic energy agency. He's here visiting relatives today, and we had the chance to have lunch. I always really enjoy visiting with Stan. He actually put his diplomatic skills to great use back in about 2003, when as chair of Augustana University College he helped negotiate the merger with the University of Alberta. He has a very keen interest in world events, world affairs, and obviously what's happening in Alberta. I'm very happy to have him here today. I'd ask that all members of the Assembly offer him the traditional warm welcome. If he could rise, please.

Introduction of Guests

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Alberta Legislature 68 visitors from Northmount elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. They are seated in both the public and members' galleries. Also, I'd like to recognize a number of the teachers that are joining this large group of school visitors: Mrs. Krystal Lim, Ms Janis Greenwood, Mr. Derek Lutz, Mrs. Denna Gates, and Mr. Conrad Lutz.

Mr. Speaker, it says at Northmount elementary school, "Another month has come and gone," just as an expression of how much time has passed, and it says, "Time flies when you are having fun!" It is my hope that the school visitors from Northmount school are having their first experience at the Alberta Legislature and having fun learning about this exciting opportunity and joining us today in the House. I would like all members of the Legislature to join me in giving an absolutely warm welcome to Northmount elementary school. I'd ask them to rise.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. The first group I'd like to introduce is a group who comes here today from l'école Maurice-Lavallée school in the riding of

Edmonton-Strathcona. With the 30 students from the school are their teachers Mme Chantal Grégoire and Mme Marie-Claude Laroche. I'm very pleased that they were able to be here today and also, I believe, to participate in the lovely ceremony that we had earlier today in the rotunda. I would ask that these students visiting today rise and receive the warm welcome of the members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly leaders from Alberta's francophone community who participated this morning in a flag-raising ceremony in the Legislature rotunda as part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a national celebration of French culture and history.

The executives are from the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, or the Francophone Economic Development Council of Alberta. This organization works closely with the province's private sector to develop tourism from francophone regions, encourage and promote business, and promote job opportunities for Albertans. We also have members from the French Canadian Association of Alberta, or the ACFA. The ACFA is the provincial organization representing all francophones.

Le gouvernement de l'Alberta est fier d'entretenir de bonnes relations avec l'ACFA en s'assurant que les francophones de l'Alberta ont accès aux services et aux ressources dont ils ont besoin.

Je demanderais à nos invités de se lever lorsque je les présente: Dolorèse Nolette, Michel Berdnikoff, Jeanne Robinson, Adèle Amyotte, Oumar Lamana, Reed Gauthier, Denis Perreux, Johanne Johnson, Rob Christie, Randy Boissonnault, Frédérick Turbide, Marc S. Tremblay. Se joignant à eux en cette journée spéciale sont des membres de mon équipe au Secrétariat francophone: Denis Tardif, directeur général, et Cindie LeBlanc, directrice adjointe.

Ces individus sont tous assis dans la galerie des membres aujourd'hui. J'aimerais demander à tous nos membres de les accueillir chaleureusement à la Legislature.

Merci, M. le Président.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you today to all members of this Assembly members of the board of management and staff of the Lamont health care centre. The Lamont health care centre is a combined acute-care auxiliary hospital and nursing home facility located in the town of Lamont. The centre's proud history began in 1912 with the establishment of the Lamont public hospital and is the result of a unique partnership between local residents and the United Church of Canada.

The board members present today and those who came before them, including the hon. the Premier, have worked tirelessly over the years to preserve a strong tradition of caring for the community by the community. A small cottage hospital with modest beginnings established just before the First World War has grown to become a fully integrated health care centre. Our guests today are in the members' gallery. I would ask them to please stand as I name them. They are Ms Trudy Herrold, Ms Connie Newgard, Ms Mae Adamyk, Reverend Lilley Glebe, and the chief executive officer, Mr. Harold James. I'd ask all members to please join me in extending our traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six film and television professionals who are seated in the public gallery. I'll ask you to please rise as I say your name. We have Lorelei Kuchera, who is the vice-president of film for IATSE, local 210. We have Mr. Don Ast, who is representing ACTRA, but most of you will know him as Nestor Pistor. Indeed, many people remember. We have Michelle Gougeon from the Directors Guild of Canada, Alberta branch; Prudence Olenik, who I was very pleased to work with at one point, also with IATSE; and Linda Bourgon, also with IATSE. I just want to point out that Linda was an Emmy award winner in 2004 for hairstyling. We're also joined by Ryan Halun, who is also with IATSE. Thank you so much for joining us. They are here to press the government for changes to the film and television industry.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you two constituents of mine who are seated in the members' gallery today. They represent St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic school district, and they are here to observe question period today. They are the superintendent, Jamie McNamara, and Arlene Hamilton, who is a Leduc ward member and a former alderman of the city of Leduc as well. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Jocelyn Stenger. Jocelyn is a first-year social work student from Grant MacEwan University and is currently doing her placement at my constituency office. She has a strong interest in the health of the community and in helping those in need. She has also developed a keen interest in electoral politics and the way in which government policy affects the lives of people in inner-city neighbourhoods. She is a much-valued addition to my constituency office, and I thank her for the wonderful work she has done so far on behalf of my constituents. I would ask Jocelyn to please now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try this one more time. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you two members from my office. The first is Ashley Fairall. Ashley is a social work student. She's in her first year of studies in the social work program at Grant MacEwan University, and she is currently doing her placement at my office. She's also serving on the MacEwan Students' Council, the student program advisory committee, and is active in the students' association. She has a strong interest in government policy and how it affects citizens in the community. I've been personally impressed with her advocacy efforts on behalf of my constituents and her patience with some of my missteps.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, I would like to also introduce Philippe

Johnson. He is my constituency assistant and has been working in my office for almost a year now. Philippe grew up in Lac La Biche, drove truck in the oil patch, went to school at U of T, has done a tremendous amount of international development work, and most recently has been working for the citizens of Edmonton-Strathcona.

I'd appreciate it if both Ashley and Philippe could rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Fallen Four Fifth Anniversary

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fifth anniversary of the deaths of four young RCMP officers in the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituency was marked with a community candlelighting at the Fallen Four Memorial Park in Mayerthorpe on March 3. It was an honour for me to have the support of my fellow MLAs who attended as well as the Solicitor General – I thank them for that – as we paused with the community to remember our heroes. I was pleased to see that the families, friends, and co-workers of constables Leo Johnston, Peter Schiemann, Brock Myrol, and Anthony Gordon were joined by family members and friends who came to honour our peacekeepers and other police officers as well.

The memorial society volunteers are to be commended on creating this great memorial and the ongoing events that honour and celebrate all who have given their lives for the uniform. The society volunteers have done a tremendous job in helping the community, the province, and the country turn a devastating tragedy into a dignified memorial park, with ongoing events to encourage healthy minds, bodies, and spirits. As always, a special thank you goes to all that have generously supported the memorial and related events.

On behalf of the society and as MLA for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne I extend an open invitation to all Albertans to share with us the memorial candlelighting of five candles and the annual RCMP memorial hockey team versus the Whitecourt Senators oldtimers' hockey team on March 19 at 6:30 at the Whitecourt Twin Arenas. There will also be a silent auction held to raise funds for the park. All donations are welcome through me.

Thank you.

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

Ports-to-Plains Alliance

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and share with the Assembly a brief update on one of our very exciting international trade partnerships, Ports-to-Plains. Essentially, Ports-to-Plains is a corridor alliance which encompasses transportation, energy, and agriculture as well as a trade corridor running from the Texas border with Mexico, through nine U.S. states, and ending up in Alberta's oil sands.

Alberta has been a member of the Ports-to-Plains Alliance for over a year, and the benefits of this membership are beginning to show, benefits like the increase in co-operation between our regional economic development alliances, or REDAs. In fact, our membership in Ports-to-Plains has prompted the REDAs along Alberta's eastern border to work together, rather than competing against each other, and form Alberta's Ports-to-Plains project.

Another benefit gained through our partnership with Ports-to-Plains is the development of strong international connections. Mr. Speaker, through this partnership connections were made with universities in Texas and memorandums were signed to work on research with universities and colleges here in Alberta. Alberta has

also gained an additional congressional advocacy group that is nine states large and regularly meets with all Senators and Congressmen in Washington.

Mr. Speaker, through my work with Port-to-Plains I've had the opportunity to speak with many government and business leaders throughout the United States, and I can say with conviction that all of them are truly impressed and excited about the benefits Alberta can bring to their businesses and to their states. But what is perhaps more exciting is that many of these leaders were really not aware of Alberta before our membership in Ports-to-Plains. They didn't really know what Alberta had to offer.

Mr. Speaker, the good work of this organization is going forward stronger than ever. The Ports-to-Plains Energy Summit in Denver, Colorado, on April 8 and 9 will give us another opportunity along with the energy industry to continue to sell Alberta and the benefits Alberta has for the American heartland.

Ports-to-Plains has proven itself to be a valuable ally in improving Alberta's competitiveness, and I'm excited to continue to work with them to meet the goals set out in Bill 1, the Alberta Competitiveness Act.

Thank you.

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

School Closures

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2009 city of Edmonton municipal census reveals that many communities are experiencing an increase in the number of school-aged children as well as preschoolers. In the city of Edmonton the number of preschool children increased between 2005 and 2009 by over 30 per cent.

This 30 per cent increase over the last four years certainly supports the government of Alberta's projections that by 2014 there will be more students than we've ever had in the school system, yet in the latest 10-year facilities plan prepared by the Edmonton public school board the school enrolment for Edmonton is projected to decrease. According to a statement on page 10 of this plan: "This projection is based on an analysis of Federal Census data from 1996 to 2006 and district student residency data derived from historical student information."

Parents demand answers to the following three questions from the school board. Why is it relying on inaccurate and outdated data when making such important decisions regarding public school closures? Why would the school board go against the city of Edmonton's own stated goal of attracting new families into older neighbourhoods to help increase the population density in central neighbourhoods? Finally, is the planning department of the school board deliberately ignoring data which does not support their recommendation to close schools in Edmonton's central neighbourhoods, or are they simply unaware of the latest census information collected by the city?

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would urge that in light of this information the Edmonton public school board cease and desist, please, in their actions to close any of the six schools in the city of Edmonton's central neighbourhoods until a proper assessment of the new data collected by the city of Edmonton is addressed.

Thank you.

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

Calgary South Health Campus

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary south health

campus is the new hospital being built in Calgary, and I'm proud to say that it's in my riding of Calgary-Hays.

When completed, the new south health campus will be a 155,000-square-metre facility that serves Calgary and will serve as a referral point for parts of southern Alberta. Not only will it contain traditional hospital resources, but it will combine leading-edge health care with the latest in technology as well as research and education in an environment that focuses on providing a healthy, healing atmosphere for patients and staff.

When phase 1 is complete in December of 2011, the facility will house 11 operating rooms, 30 emergency exam rooms, 65 short-stay beds, 12 intensive care beds, 216 additional in-patient care beds, and space for 200,000 outpatient visits a year. Just to put that in perspective, that's about the same number of beds as the expanding Rockyview general hospital and twice the outpatient visits as the Foothills Medical Centre.

The Calgary south health campus will have a tremendous impact on my constituency, allowing for better access to health facilities. Not only this, but it will bring jobs and an economic benefit to my riding. In fact, when fully operational the south health campus will employ approximately 2,000 people.

I look forward to the opening and what this hospital will bring to my constituency and Calgary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Hospital Construction in Grande Prairie

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently was in Grande Prairie, where the main concern was when they will receive a new hospital, a hospital that's been needed for some years for their growing, thriving community. This was promised back in 2007. To the Premier: with the Premier being so willing to talk of the priorities and concerns of the people of Calgary, will he now speak of the priorities for the people of Grande Prairie? Will the new QE II replacement hospital be started this year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of large projects where the tenders have been closed, which will produce some savings. Treasury Board and Infrastructure are evaluating how much money there is in savings. I've also instructed the minister of health to look at those projects that we have set aside money for, but during the huge inflationary period that we went through, the costs really rose. I've asked him to revisit all those projects. That would be Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, Slave Lake, I believe, or High Prairie, and a number of other locations, including some of the long-term care residences.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the people want to have some definite response. Will the Premier give some definite information to the people of Grande Prairie about when they can expect shovels to be in the ground for a new hospital in Grande Prairie? When?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health will be visiting the city of Grande Prairie in 10 days or so. He'll be visiting with the community and with council and will share some information with them.

Dr. Swann: Well, another health concern for the people of Grande Prairie was the deplorable state of the Grande Prairie Care Centre, a long-term care centre urgently needing to be replaced or exten-

sively renovated. Will the Premier commit to providing funding for long-term care needs in Grande Prairie?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe that during the period of time of this inflation we did release about \$10 million to the hospital to help support some changes in code requirements. As I said before, the minister will be in Grande Prairie in a number of days and will be able to sit down with the board, the chamber and discuss the situation.

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

Health Facilities Capital Plans

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in the ongoing health care saga the only thing that seems to have been accomplished in this last two years is confusion, frustration, and uncertainty. This is the product of failed centralization without a plan, no cost-benefit analysis, and no checks and balances in place. First to the Premier. I hope we'll get an answer today on this question. What is the explanation for conflicting messages coming from this government and from Alberta Health Services? Who is actually in charge, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are no conflicting messages. We are the only jurisdiction in Canada that has not only removed, paid off the accumulated deficit but has given Alberta Health Services increased funding for five years. That's the only plan of its kind in the whole country of Canada.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'll try to the minister of health, then, Mr. Speaker. Please clarify this: do you have the final decision on whether Calgary will or will not receive the much-needed new cancer centre? Yes or no?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated on several occasions in the House, a capital plan for \$2.5 billion over the next three years will be available in a matter of days. I will be sitting down with the Minister of Infrastructure, with colleagues from Calgary and from elsewhere discussing that, and we will roll out the good news at that time.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, another question revolves around what criteria are used for determining the priority of capital health projects. Are these determined based on need or on political expediency?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's such an easy one to answer I thought I'd get up. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition had an opportunity to read the capital plan, the 20-year strategic capital plan, how priorities are set is listed in the whole plan, and that's not only for health facilities, schools but for roads and other infrastructure as well.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Waterfowl Deaths in Oil Sands Tailings Pond

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no question that ducks died on tailings ponds controlled by Syncrude, but the Premier's policy of maintaining a wilful ignorance of the damage done to our international reputation is not helping. How can the Premier say that he's on top of this file when he hasn't even seen the

photos that the rest of the world is looking at? This is the single biggest black mark on Alberta's oil sands industry ever. My question is to the Premier. What sort of a briefing has the Premier had? Don't ask, don't tell?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. Of course I saw the very same photos that everyone in this Assembly saw when the ducks first perished in the tailings pond. I saw, you know, volunteers trying to remove the oil with cotton swabs off the ducks' bills. However, that was when the incident originally took place. The reference here is to the pictures that are evidence in the trial that is before us. I was very frank to the reporter yesterday. I did not see those pictures at all prior to them being delivered to the court as evidence. This is a serious situation before the court. It's a very good act that we have. We've charged the company that's responsible for it, and let the court decide.

The Speaker: I'm not sure where this is leading, but if this matter is sub judice, I'm going to seek advice from the Minister of Justice. But I don't think so from the first question.

The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. Mr. Premier, people see these images and ask: what is Alberta doing to stop this? What direct action is the Premier taking to give leadership on tailings ponds reclamation, on hard targets on emissions, on reducing the use of water, and all the other environmental issues that go along with this?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have the strictest environmental laws in the nation, and that is why in this particular case under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act the charges were laid to the company pursuant to that act.

With respect to the Fort McMurray area, Mr. Speaker, there is no area in Canada or perhaps even in North America that is as closely monitored on a 24-hour basis 365 days a year for air, water, and soil quality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the Premier again. Spin, spin, spin. Leadership is not about spin. It's not about rebranding. It's about actions taken to achieve a particular result. Is the Premier happy with the result so far? We have dozens of pages in international magazines talking about what a disgrace this is. Are you happy with it so far?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there's a lot that has been done in Fort McMurray and, in fact, right across Alberta with respect to the development of resources. There is a lot of attention paid, obviously, to this area because there is a fair amount of production of oil, and it has attracted a lot of attention. But, again, if you go back to third-party evaluation, 98 per cent of the time the air quality in Fort Saskatchewan and Fort McMurray, in those two areas, which have a large oil and gas and value-added presence, is better than or equal to any major Canadian city in North America.

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

Oil Royalty Framework

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Wildrose Alliance caucus released our energy competitiveness strategy outlining what the government should do to assist our energy

industry to recover from the devastating effects of this Premier's new royalty framework. In it we have noted that prior to the NRF coming into effect, the Premier and his cabinet were repeatedly warned by multiple caucus members, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, and dozens of industry stakeholders that this policy would devastate our economy, and indeed it did. To the Premier: why didn't he listen to the warnings of those who actually understood the energy industry far better than he did?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I made it very clear that we will have the most innovative and competitive economy in North America, and an opposition report does not change that. We are pursuing the competitiveness review on a number of levels: the oil and gas sector – very important – agriculture, forestry, tourism. I'd like to add small business to that and as well look at how we can attract more financial institutions to the province of Alberta.

Mr. Anderson: It was very competitive before this Premier got his hands on it. That's for sure.

By the fall of 2008 the economy was tanking. Prior to that, land sales for oil and gas exploration in Alberta had significantly decreased on fears that this Premier would actually implement the NRF while land sales in B.C. and Saskatchewan increased during that same period. He had so many warnings, hundreds of warnings from people who actually knew what they were talking about. To the Premier: what possible explanation does he have for barreling ahead with this destructive policy despite all competent advice to the contrary?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we will have the most innovative and competitive economy in North America. We are working through the competitiveness review, and that's why we have a bill before this House, which I know will be passed and supported by all sides of the House as we proceed. We will then decide what factors to measure in terms of how we rate in competitiveness not only to other jurisdictions in Canada, North America, but indeed other places around the world.

Mr. Anderson: This study should have been done long before he tampered with our most important industry.

I have hundreds and hundreds of constituents who have suffered a great deal of hardship because of this Premier's poor decision on this issue. I would suggest that most of the members in this room could say the same. Mr. Premier, will you apologize to Albertans for the consequences your decisions have had?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in fact, as oil prices fell drastically from about \$147 a barrel down to \$37 and gas was as low as \$3, what we did was introduced some amendments to the royalty framework, and those amendments were embraced by the hon. member that has brought it up. I also would like to table an appropriate number of copies of a letter he wrote to the *Airdrie City View* that says that he is supporting the changes that we made in the royalty framework.

The Speaker: We'll do the tablings at the appropriate time.

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

New School Construction in Beaumont

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town of Beaumont is recognized as one of the 20 fastest growing communities in Canada.

With a population of approximately 12,000 people, 25 per cent are under the age of 14. [interjections]

The Speaker: Leduc-Beaumont-Devon has the floor.

Mr. Rogers: Mr. Speaker, the school-age population is exploding so much that one elementary school has a classroom across the road in the community hall. The separate and public boards have agreed to a joint K to 9 facility, but there is no school in the current three-year program. To the Minister of Education: how soon can my constituents see a school in Beaumont?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a major building program going on in this province with about \$7 billion this year to capital, and that's very aggressive. There'll be 42 new schools being built. There are over 101 major projects going on. But I have to say that we still do not, within all of that, have enough to do all the projects that are needed. There is very definitely a need in Beaumont. We're working very hard. I've asked the school boards to work with me to come up with innovative ways to do it, and I'm prepared to take those innovative ways to Treasury Board and to cabinet to find new ways to get those schools built that we need to build. But I'd have to say that I cannot give the hon. member an assurance today as to a time frame.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. He mentions innovative ideas. The separate board has recently proposed a temporary lease space option. My question to the minister: is this a viable solution that you're willing to support?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, if I may say, we had an interchange with the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere in the prior question, and I just can't resist the opportunity to point out that in his comments answering the budget, he suggested we stretch out our building program even further. Under his program with his wild and rosy colleagues they would have us even wait longer for a school in Beaumont. But in answer to the question, the proposal made by the school board is exactly what I've been asking for. Now, unfortunately, I don't have the money to finance it, so I have to find a way to do that.

Mr. Rogers: Well, Mr. Speaker, at least I'm pleased to hear that the minister is willing to look at the proposal. In light of that, then, Mr. Minister, I'm just wondering what the possibility is of a P3 solution. What signs of hope can we pass on to the students of Beaumont today?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I have to find and take forward is a way – and we're building a capital plan to do that – to take these priority projects forward within the context of a three-year capital plan that's already committed but where we're finding savings, as we've mentioned earlier in this House, because projects are coming in under budget, so we'll be able to profile those to take advantage of those savings. We may be able to cast it as a P3 project. We may be able to cast it in the innovative way in which the board has with respect to interim lease processes. But in order to give any assurances as to timing, I have to have the money, and right now I don't have the money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Sour Gas Well Blowout Insurance

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A sour gas blowout near Hythe has been burning for almost two weeks now, and regulators are saying that it might take another two weeks to fully put it out. Now, while blowouts are rare, industry is required to take out insurance to protect themselves. Unfortunately, their insurance does nothing to cover the losses incurred by Albertans as owners of the resource. To the Minister of Energy. During a blowout there is an absolute open flow of gas which is much higher than normal production rates. How much gas is expected to have been released over the last two weeks?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Companies are not required to pay royalties on gas that is not produced, so the gas wasn't the only thing going up in smoke for the last couple of weeks. How much money in royalties is the province expecting to lose because of this blowout?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, if I don't have the answer to the first question, I don't have the answer to the second.

Mr. Taylor: Well, then, hopefully, Mr. Speaker, the minister will be able to provide written answers to those questions and perhaps this one as well, written or oral. Albertans are the owners of the resource, so why hasn't this government made it mandatory for blowout insurance to cover the loss in royalties?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that he should put those questions on the Order Paper, and I will respond accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Immigrant Investor Program

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our immigration system needs to attract the best and brightest people to Alberta, including investors and entrepreneurs. Many provinces already have an entrepreneur stream within their provincial nominee programs. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Will Alberta open its doors and its immigration system to investors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. All provinces have different needs, and in Alberta we want to make sure that Alberta's needs are met by our immigration program. For a while already Alberta has had a shortage of skilled and unskilled labour. That's what our ministry, this department, has been focusing on, attracting the appropriate workers to the province of Alberta.

Mr. Benito: My first supplemental to the same minister. Now is the time to build up our economy and prepare for when it picks up. Why hasn't this entrepreneur stream actually started yet?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the economy has changed, the landscape has changed. We are looking into an entrepreneur stream of immigrants to come to our province. However, we're looking at experiences from other provinces. We know that some other provinces had certain issues with varieties of this program. We want to make sure that when or if we introduce such a program to Alberta, it is right for Alberta and it brings the value-added that we need in Alberta.

Mr. Benito: My final question is to the same minister. The federal government has an immigrant investor program. Why does Alberta not participate in that program?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the federal program is a program that Alberta has chosen not to participate in. It requires immigrants to invest \$400,000 into the Canadian economy, giving Alberta really no control over what industries or what genres of industries those dollars would be invested in. We want to make sure that when immigrants come to this province, they give value-added to our industry, they help us diversify our economy, and they will benefit Alberta the way we want them to benefit Alberta. We want to have that final choice.

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

Support for the Film Industry

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last July an open letter to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit concerning the state of Alberta film and TV was signed by a wide cross-section of representatives. This was followed in December by a proposal from the Alberta film and television unions to combine streams 2 and 3, expand the number and description of key positions, implement regional bonuses, and re-establish a recoupable development fund. It is now too late to save a spring or summer shooting season, but with a quick response the minister could save the fall season. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: when can we expect a response from the minister to this proposal?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have the information with my officials, and they are working on some proposals for me. We have in our department over the last two years made a multitude of changes to the film development program with the idea of enhancing business in our province, making ourselves more attractive. Just last November we included \$800,000 for money to promote Alberta stories, project and script development, export market development, training and mentoring along with increasing our cap from \$1.5 million to \$3 million to \$5 million.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister. Well, currently we are not competitive. My question is: why is the minister creating a situation where Albertans trained in Alberta are forced to go to B.C., Quebec, or even New Mexico to work? To put it another way, why are we training talent and crew for our competitors?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're in disagreement. I believe we are competitive. People in British Columbia and Ontario say that we're competitive. Our labour rate as of last September was the

most competitive in Canada. It's probably the third most competitive now. We're not in a race to the bottom. If you talk to the film producers, the people who actually put their money on the line, who actually are out there trying to bring business to our province, they're very enthusiastic about our prospects for the next six months. I'm not sure what the member opposite is listening to.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm looking at how many people are working in this province. That's what's important to me, Albertans working.

Given the Premier's focus on competitiveness and given that for every dollar spent toward production, the film and television industry generates \$10.80 in Alberta, why can't the minister see the film and TV sector as easy pickings for the government's competitiveness checklist?

Mr. Blackett: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has her facts incorrect. The amount of return on investment is \$6 for \$1, not \$10.80. We went through the minister of finance; we went through the department. We sat down with AMPIA; we sat down with other industry representatives. We agreed on \$6. If we're going to move forward collectively, let's at least work with the same information, and let's get the facts straight. Let's work together and make sure that we're competitive and attract business to our province.

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

Sport, Recreation, and Physical Activity Funding

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent media reports have focused on the province's attempts to reduce rising obesity trends, and many of my constituents are concerned about reports that funds to sport, recreation, and physical activity initiatives are being cut by nearly 40 per cent in the new provincial budget. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Can the minister explain these cuts at a time when a growing number of Albertans are overweight or obese because they're not active enough?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. We're concerned about the obesity levels, no question, as we see the trends that are emerging, but I think it's important to note that this government is investing \$23 million in some 100 sports organizations. I think that the confusion has come in from last year's budget in areas of money that were flowing through. About \$6.6 million was the Olympics, and \$9 million was the final instalment for WinSport Canada, which was redeveloping the facilities at Canada Olympic Park. In fact, it's only about, you know, \$1.8 million out of a \$23 million budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Constituents are curious: what was the process that was used to determine which sport and recreation groups would be affected by these reductions in funding?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's always difficult to make decisions when you have to meet budget targets, but we tried to look at this overarching. We looked at all the different sports organizations. We're just doing, basically, a reduction of a percentage of each organization so no organization feels the pain too hard. As well, we've avoided any organizations with persons with disability. We

were able to protect their rent. Where they're housed, at Percy Page, they pay a dollar a year. We felt really good about that. We'll continue to work with these organizations.

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, I've had inquiries from a number of people with a number of organizations across the province, and they're very curious about the new provincial policy on sport. They've been waiting for it for some time, a little bit of time anyway, and they're wondering: what's the timeline for the new provincial policy on sport and recreation in the business plan of the minister for this current year?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working with the 10 other provincial ministries involved in developing this policy. It's still early days. We're just at the draft form. We need to go out and consult and get better information from our stakeholders, but we're hoping that we can finalize the policy sometime this fall.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Grizzly Bear Management

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2002 the Endangered Species Conservation Committee recommended that the grizzly be listed as a threatened species. The government ignored this recommendation. Given that there are fewer than 700 grizzlies left in Alberta, my spider sense tells me that these experts will recommend this again on Friday at the minister's scheduled meeting. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: given that experts state that the grizzly bear is a threatened species, why won't this minister simply list it as such?

Mr. Knight: Well, that's an interesting observation that the member opposite has made. My recollection of what's going to happen here, Mr. Speaker, is that there is a committee that will meet on the 12th of March, and at that point a decision will be made. To my knowledge no decision has been made other than what some folks might have put in the papers or other places, that individuals read and then presume that something is going to happen. I will wait, appropriately, until the 12th of March, until our committee has made the determination and given me a report, and then we will respond.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I misheard the minister last night when I thought he said that he wasn't going to list the grizzly bear as an endangered species. I guess, then, my return question: if this committee, the Endangered Species Conservation Committee, again recommends to you that it should be listed as an endangered species, will you take their advice after their meeting on the 12th?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, it is not my position now nor will it be in the next few days to list any species in Alberta as endangered. We have a process. The gentleman is asking a question now relative to something that went on in estimates last night: a point blank question if I was going to say that bears are endangered in Alberta. I was not prepared last night to say that, and I'm not prepared this afternoon to say that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that estimates is where we have open and candid discussions with a minister. At least, I think that's the process. Last night, again taking the minister at his word, he said that he wasn't in a position to put a moratorium on harvesting bears. If the minister is not in a position to put a moratorium on hunting bears, then who is?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm going to have to go through this again. We have a process in place. We have a grizzly bear recovery program in place, and I'm going to let that process work. Once we receive the information from the committee, we'll be in a better position to be able to determine what the status of this species is in the province of Alberta. At that point we will deal with the issue.

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

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier showed startling ignorance when he claimed not to have seen the images of the ducks dying on Syncrude's tailings lake. These pictures show the world the consequences of this government's environmental negligence in the development of the oil sands. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Why is your government ignoring this problem instead of implementing a firm deadline for oil sands companies to eliminate these tailings lakes altogether?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the preamble and the question, this government is hardly ignoring the issue. In fact, we have stated very publicly and very emphatically that it is our intention to eliminate the need for tailings ponds in oil sands production over a reasonable period of time, and that's probably seven to nine years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think the government has no such plan.

The photographs and the videos of what happened at Syncrude's tailings lakes are an indictment of this government's failure to develop these oil sands in an environmentally responsible manner. Why does the government continue to ignore the problem instead of requiring oil sands companies to adopt alternative technologies like dry tailings, fluid extraction, or ozone treatment?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the government was ignoring the problem, we wouldn't be dealing with a court case where the photos that the member references were brought forward as evidence. That's hardly ignoring the situation. We are and will continue to be committed to improving the technology that's employed. There are very, very promising technologies. In fact, when I toured the University of Calgary just three weeks ago, the new faculty that has just opened there has got all kinds of very, very promising work under way that will significantly reduce the amount of environmental impact on resource development.

2:20

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this government was forced into that prosecution by private prosecutions that were brought by environmental groups.

Albertans can ill afford a government that turns a blind eye to the biggest environmental embarrassment our province has ever witnessed. These images and videos expose this government's inability to balance oil sands development with environmental stewardship. Why won't this minister demonstrate to the world that his government is committed to solving this problem by implementing concrete deadlines to clean up tailings lakes and mandating the use of technology that would make them entirely obsolete?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would advise this member that he should stay tuned. He should watch the progress as we make it, and he may just find that what he requests may in fact become a reality.

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

New School Construction in St. Albert

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The St. Albert Protestant school board has been working with a private developer to provide a new school in Erin Ridge North, a new subdivision in St. Albert, for three years now. The developer is proposing a P3 where there would be no government capital required and would follow the standard 30-year payback. My question to the Minister of Education is: what seems to be the delay in getting the proposal approved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't discuss the specifics of a particular proposal by a developer, but I would say this: there's always money involved, and I don't have any.

The longer answer, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier in the House, is that we have to develop alternative ways of developing capital. This is a very good proposal. I've encouraged the developer and the school board to work on the proposal, and I will be working with Treasury Board to get permission to do alternative capital programs as and when they make sense and as and when we can put them into our capital plan.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. The private P3 concept seems to be a win-win situation for everyone involved. The school gets a new facility, the first one in 20 years, the developer has a school in this new subdivision, and the government has no up-front capital costs. What is the downside to this proposal?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's a good proposal. In fact, it's an excellent proposal. We need to do some work on sharpening the pencils and getting the numbers into the area where we could go out to the public and say that this has the best value we could possibly get because there's no other way to do a one-off project. It's either an RFP, where everybody gets to bid, or we can clearly demonstrate the value of the project. We can work on that, but there's no point in getting to that stage until I can work with Treasury Board and with government on our capital policy process because at the end of the day it has to fit into the long-term capital plan. It has to be funded.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, my final question to the same minister. The government of Alberta has adopted P3s for massive schools in Edmonton and Calgary. Is the government not prepared to consider a single, individual, private P3 proposal?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would hope very much that we would

be able to consider those. I just have to find the right process and the right way to fit it into our capital plan so that a project which is a very valuable project, which could be done at considerable savings to government and the school board, which can serve that community very well, can also fit into our capital planning process because at the end of the day, whether it's spending this year or next year or three years out or five years out, it is spending, it is investment, and it needs to be accounted for. We need to align those processes. We haven't quite got it to the stage where we can align those processes, but I'm working on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April 2008 a foster care review report was released. In November 2009 a kinship review report was released. Their recommendations have been widely ignored. A review of the child intervention system was initiated last summer. We're still waiting for the report, but funding to intervention services was just cut by \$27 million. This government initiates review after review of broken systems but then undermines its findings. To the minister: how many foster and kinship homes in this province have more than their approved number of children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not able to give you an exact number at this time. I can get that number and give it to the member. I can tell you this. The foster care review report, the eight recommendations that were put in place – it's very clear about the screening process, about the home orientation, about the training for foster parents. I can tell you as well that there are provisions there for level 1 or level 2 support workers to have more children in their home when it's been identified to be reasonable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll look forward to the follow-up information.

Right now it's a first-bed, first-served circumstance for foster children as opposed to placing them carefully. When will this haphazard approach to placing children in foster and kinship homes based solely on beds available end?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, I think that you should apologize for that preamble, for what you're saying about the way that children are placed in this province. I can tell you that the foster care system works very, very well with the people in the field and that they take their responsibilities very seriously. That foster care review report with those eight recommendations: you should read that, hon. member, and you would know the strong screening process that's in place for our foster parents. You'd also know about the good work that's being done in the field by our foster care workers.

Mr. Chase: There is no doubt that there are wonderful foster care parents out there. Unfortunately, not enough.

Was the decision to cut \$27 million from children intervention services made based on preliminary findings of the children's intervention system review? What's the justification?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated to you before, it's a \$1.1 billion budget in this ministry. There is a 3 per cent reduction. Yes, there has been a reduction in the child intervention area of the budget. I will be monitoring that very closely. That reduction was made based on what the staff indicated, that the systems that have been put in place that have changed the way the service delivery is occurring for more placements of children actually create efficiencies. As I said, I will monitor that very closely. I'll ensure that the supports and resources are available, and if they aren't, I'll take the appropriate measures to seek more funding if needed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Winagami Lake Fish Management

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every now and then the lakes in my constituency experience a fish kill due to the lack of oxygen in the lakes. This is devastating for all stakeholders relying on this precious economic resource. I am now told that a fish kill is possible in Winagami Lake. This is no way to manage a lake that many people expect some economic benefit out of. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What management plans do we have for Winagami Lake, and who is involved in determining those management plans?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the situation at Winagami Lake, of course, doesn't happen often. The lake is very shallow, about four metres deep at its deepest point, and it's very productive, in fact. Winter ice cover, of course, creates a situation where there's little chance of reoxygenation in the lake, and in the spring, mostly in March, the oxygen levels tend to be low. We continue to work with that. We monitor the lake twice a week. There are a number of fisheries that are sustained there, First Nations fisheries as well as a sports fishery and commercial fishing. We continue to work with those groups to monitor the lake.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's really good that we're starting to include all the people that should be determining what happens in that kind of a management plan.

My second question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development as well. What is the allowable, acceptable level of oxygen for Winagami Lake at this time of year?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're monitoring the lake. Currently the levels of oxygen are at acceptable levels for fish to survive. The minimum amount of oxygen that you would expect to have in a lake like that and not have fish mortality is about one and a half milligrams per litre. I believe that's the right number.

Ms Calahasen: If the oxygen level is at one and a half and certain areas in Winagami Lake are at 1.3, why is it that we would not do everything we can to attempt to save a resource that's so crucial to many people in my constituency? Would you continue to ensure that the fishermen can continue to extract the resource so that we can save as many fish as we can?

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we've already actually done that. What we did was instituted a fishery about four or five days early this year, on the 26th of February in fact, and allowed about a hundred thousand tonnes of whitefish, and the margins of other sports fish were caught at that particular point in time. Since that

time the oxygen levels have returned and maintained themselves at around two milligrams a litre. We're watching that, and we will institute a salvage fishery if, in fact, it appears that the fish become in jeopardy.

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

2:30 Online Government Services

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the provincial budget Service Alberta will have 410 full-time employees cut from its staff, most of them in information technology support roles. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. How can the minister plan to offer more services to Albertans online and cut the IT people needed to manage those services at the same time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated before, part of Service Alberta's budget, which I defended in my estimates, is about transforming the way that we do government. That's what Service Alberta is leading. If you look at the areas of technology and the areas of efficiencies we found, yes, there will be some reducing of employees there; there's no question. But when we can find duplication and have efficiencies in government, that's a good thing for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What assurances can the minister provide that cuts made to IT support staff won't impair Alberta's SuperNet access, that many rural and remote communities depend on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the whole SuperNet and rural connectivity that is something that I've been working very hard on. The ongoing team within Service Alberta is working hard, working with all the ministries that are involved with the SuperNet and making sure that Albertans have access to SuperNet, whether it's through their ISP providers or whether it's through the other services that are available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. Last July the health records of 11,000 Albertans were at risk of capture by a computer hacker. How can Albertans be sure that these massive departmental layoffs won't leave the information that they provide to the government less secure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the security of Albertans' information that is something that we work on very hard, and the Auditor General brought that to this department's attention a couple of years ago. These last two years we've worked very hard in that area to ensure that the information is protected. That's access to information and as well all the good work that the registry agents do when they are working and having access to the information. It's that partnership that we work very hard on as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Foreign-trained Physicians

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent statistics list Calgary's population at over 1 million people. Twenty-five per cent of Calgarians, or more than 250,000 people, don't have access to a family doctor. Many of these people are seniors, children, and new Canadians. To the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness: what action is the minister undertaking to ensure that Calgarians and all Albertans, for that matter, can access a family doctor when they need one?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that if those individuals don't have a family doctor, they are at least accessing doctors in many of the medical walk-in clinics that exist. But I should say, too, Mr. Speaker, that our physician per population ratio of 201 to a population of 100,000 is the highest average in and amongst all Canadian provinces. It's the highest national average, which is at, I think, 195. I would also say that our physician supply is growing faster and is the youngest physician supply in the country and the best paid as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians say that the best place to get sick is either in a taxicab or in a hotel, where either the driver or the cleaner is likely to be a medical doctor who may have tried for years to obtain residency. Mr. Speaker, what is the minister doing to get more of these highly trained foreign doctors, who have met all the requirements, into the medical system so Albertans do not have to utilize emergency rooms for routine health issues?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that between 2004 and 2008 the number of internationally trained physicians increased by about 36.1 per cent. That's an increase of about 575 physicians, which is outstanding. Alberta's medical residency programs also increased in size virtually every year since 2004. In fact, this year we're providing about \$25 million to support the integration of international medical graduates into our provincial health system. Also very good news.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite a doctor shortage in the province and despite the \$1.5 billion increase in the Health and Wellness budget the government slashed the number of residency spots available to foreign-trained doctors from 70 to 40 for this year. What is the rationale for this decrease?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we actually have up to 50 residency positions for which these internationally trained medical folks are able to apply. I can assure the hon. member that since 2001 Alberta Health and Wellness has done its best to provide the adequate funding to accommodate as many of those residency spots as possible. There are complexities such as accreditation and licensing and other equivalency factors that have to be taken into account. Nonetheless, we are making good progress, and we're also providing funding to international agencies to help out.

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

Oil Royalty Framework

(continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June 2009 the Premier promised Albertans that their competitiveness review would be completed by the fall of 2009. Since then industry has gone through another winter drilling season with more uncertainty because this government can't get it done. We are now seeing an increase in speculation related to the acquisition and drilling rights on acreages. Clearly, this government's royalty robbery has cost Albertans billions. They continue to cost us millions. To the Minister of Energy: when will your competitiveness review be published so that industry can possibly move forward with more certainty?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it will be published the day we decide to release it, and that will be shortly.

Mr. Hinman: That's why the industry and investors are so excited about Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have long memories, and people who were here understand the devastation of the national energy program. Albertans will not forget that it was this PC government that yanked the rug out from underneath the oil and gas workers and industry here in Alberta. After the great royalty robbery this minister told the oil and gas industry to suck it up. Is he still telling industry to suck it up as the industry continues to lay off people and cut spending?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure who he's referring to that made those comments because that was not me.

As I said earlier, we will be imminently releasing the competitiveness review, not only releasing the competitiveness review but government's response and actions to it, and I believe it'll be very well received by industry.

Mr. Hinman: Well, they believed they were going to get something last fall, so we'll see.

The minister has a real attitude problem, and everybody in Alberta knows it. He bullied the teachers, and it cost the taxpayers billions of dollars. He bullied the medical profession, and it cost the taxpayers billions of dollars. The government bullied the energy industry, and it cost the taxpayers billions of dollars. Does this minister know how many billions of dollars have been invested outside of Alberta because of this government's royalty robbery?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the absurdity of that question says a lot about the person who's asking it. How could anyone stand here and estimate how much investment has taken place outside of Alberta in the entire world? It tells a lot about this particular member.

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

Syphilis Prevention and Control

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's rate of syphilis infection is double the national average, and the problem is only getting worse with the infection rate continuing to increase last year. To the minister of health: will he now admit that this crisis is the direct result of his government's decision to reject advice from public health doctors given back in 2007?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, this is indeed a very serious issue. I indicated yesterday that we are very serious about eliminating

syphilis in this province within the five-year window, which is a very commendable and reachable goal. It's all about accessing the treatment that's required right now. It's all about focusing on prevention and generating more awareness to stop the flow.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the five-year window had opened three years ago, we'd be almost there.

Last year six babies were born with syphilis, and three died. The only other jurisdictions where you see numbers like this are developing countries that struggle with provision of basic food and shelter. Will the minister commit today to implementing an antisiphilic campaign for the general population as recommended by his staff three years ago?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, I will have the report from Alberta's chief medical officer very, very soon. In the meantime, I would like Albertans to know and I'd like this hon. member to know that we are increasing prenatal screening to help prevent the kind of circumstances that she has just alluded to. We have a larger goal in mind as well, and that's to eliminate syphilis entirely. We'll be looking at other issues such as gonorrhea and chlamydia and so on at the same time.

2:40

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, last week the minister's head of public health said that provincial efforts to stop syphilis were delayed by H1N1, yet this Legislature just approved extra dollars for the H1N1 campaign, so that shouldn't have had any impact at all. Your government has known about the epidemic for years, and you've had recommendations since 2007. Why are Albertans still waiting for action?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, we got hit by a pandemic which had to be dealt with and had to be dealt with immediately to help protect over 3 million Albertans. I think the group that did that did a very commendable job.

With respect to the syphilis issue, I've already indicated that we have a 14-person team that's addressing this immediately. There will be a further report on it very shortly, and we will stay focused on our goal to eliminate it within five years.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period. Eighteen members, 12 in opposition to the government, were recognized today for 108 questions and answers.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine, and I will call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill in about 15 seconds from now.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie 2010

Dr. Brown: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui je me lève à l'Assemblée pour souligner le début des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, une célébration nationale de la culture, de la langue, et du patrimoine français qui se déroulera du 5 au 21 mars. Ici en Alberta les communautés francophones ont lancé les festivités le 5 mars avec des levers de drapeaux partout à travers la province, et les festivités se poursuivront pendant les deux prochaines semaines pour les Albertains de tous les âges et d'origines diverses. Voilà une excellente occasion pour nous tous de se rassembler et de célébrer notre histoire et nos merveilleuses traditions.

La francophonie albertaine est vibrante et diverse. Alors que l'on célèbre notre riche patrimoine, nous tournons également les yeux vers l'avenir en accueillant en Alberta des nouvelles personnes, traditions, et cultures. Au cours de la dernière année la communauté francophone s'est agrandie, et les centres d'établissements francophones continuent d'accueillir et de fournir des services bien importants aux nouveaux arrivants. L'apprentissage demeure une priorité clé pour le gouvernement, et ainsi l'éducation de langue française dans notre province continue de prendre de l'ampleur et s'accroît.

M. le Président, je tiens à remercier les membres de cette Chambre pour leur appui continu, et je vous invite tous à participer à ces célébrations afin de souligner les contributions des francophones au riche patrimoine albertain.

[Translation] I rise in the Assembly today to announce the start of Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a national celebration of French culture, language, and history that runs from March 5 to March 21. Here in Alberta francophone communities started celebrations on March 5 with flag-raising ceremonies across the province, followed by two weeks of celebrations for Albertans of all ages and all backgrounds. This is a great opportunity for all of us to come together and celebrate our beautiful traditions and history.

Alberta's Francophonie is vibrant and diverse. As we celebrate our rich past, we also look to the future by welcoming new people, traditions, and cultures to Alberta. In the last year the francophone community has seen growth as francophone settlement centres continue to welcome and provide much-needed services to newcomers. French-language education in our province continues to expand and grow as learning remains a key priority for this government.

Mr. Speaker, I thank members of this House for their continued support, and I invite you all to take in these and other celebrations to mark the contributions of francophones to Alberta's rich heritage. [As submitted]

The Speaker: Merci, M. le Député.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Jennie Flett

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week Fort Chipewyan, the oldest settlement in our province and certainly part of my constituency, mourned the loss of elder Jennie Flett. She was 101 years old, often referred to as Mum. She was born in 1908. When her mother died, Jennie took on the daunting responsibility of raising her 10 siblings. She married her husband, Ed, in June 1927, and they had a very large family of their own.

Jennie followed in her mother's footsteps, and at the age of 18 she became a midwife. She taught herself midwifery, gaining her knowledge from her mother. She delivered – and I say this slowly – 450 babies for the province of Alberta. The incredible journey that she had was actually featured on CBC television when she celebrated her hundredth birthday. She never lost a baby or a mother, an incredible feat in today's medical terms considering the conditions she worked in. There was no electricity. There were no vehicles in those days. She travelled from trappers' cabins to wigwams via dog teams in every imaginable weather condition. Husbands came to her in blizzards in the middle of the night on snowshoes. She definitely was the stuff legends are made of.

Jennie, as I mentioned, was often referred to as Mum. She retired from delivering babies at the ripe age of 75. She received a lifetime achievement award from RARA, and on her 100th birthday she was awarded an honorary nursing diploma from Keyano College. She was the oldest Métis women in Wood Buffalo. She dedicated her

life to her community and to helping others in northern Alberta.

Our province is a better place because of Jennie Flett. She died on the fourth floor of our hospital, where she had spent quite some time. Our prayers and thoughts are with her family and all those she has helped over her past 101 years.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill Pr. 1

Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act. I've signed it and dated it.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Bill Pr. 2

Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 3

Lamont Health Care Centre Act

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 3, the Lamont Health Care Centre Act.

The Lamont health care centre is a combined acute-care and auxiliary hospital and nursing home facility located in Lamont, Alberta. It is operated by a board of management established as a corporate entity by ministerial order under sections 4 and 5 of the Hospitals Act. The purpose of the Lamont Health Care Centre Act is to allow for continued and uninterrupted operation of the facilities subsequent to amendments under the Health Facilities Accountability Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, which will remove the opportunity for the board to continue after that bill is proclaimed in force.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Mr. Premier, did you have a tabling? The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the article in the *Airdrie City View* by the MLA of December 19, 2008, where the member highlights that the new royalty regime has some positive elements to it, that there was a global economic slowdown, plummeting oil and gas prices, and competitive royalty regimes in Saskatchewan and B.C.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table an appropriate number of copies of a memorandum that I have sent to the chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy. 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 minimum wage in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 20 postcards signed by Albertans calling on the provincial government to keep its promise to build 600 new long-term care beds. The postcards are part of a campaign sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which has gathered signed postcards from approximately 2,500 Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, my second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of photographs of dead and dying ducks from the oil sands. These include some of the pictures that the Premier has claimed not to have seen, so I'm tabling them today for him and other members of the Assembly. These photographs relate to my questions earlier today.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you mentioned in your first statement that you had 2,500, so I take it you're going to table all 2,500 at one time, or are you going to, like, 20 a day for the next hundred days?

Mr. Mason: I think we'll do 20 a day for as long as we can.

The Speaker: So we're going to need a minute a day or a minute and a half a day for the next hundred days.

Mr. Mason: Well, I won't read them individually, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, thank you.

Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before we begin, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

Ms DeLong: Well, I'm afraid that we've missed our opportunity to introduce Marg Mrazek, the past president of the PC Party. She was here, and unfortunately we've just missed her, so we'll have to do it another time.

Main Estimates 2010-11

Executive Council

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. We have for consideration Executive Council main estimates.

The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you. Mr. Chairman and hon. members, I'm pleased to appear before this committee to discuss the 2010-2011 Executive Council budget estimates and the 2010-2013 business plan. I'd like to begin by introducing the staff that are with me today. We have up in the gallery Elan MacDonald, who is the deputy chief of staff for policy and strategy; George Samoil, up there waving, chief of staff for operations and legislative affairs; Jason Ennis, my executive assistant; Bob Fessenden, who will be here shortly, deputy minister of the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy; Anita Lunden, representing the Agency Governance Secretariat; Cam Hantiuk, director of communications; Jerry Bellikka, director of media relations; and Lee Funke, the new managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau. They're with us.

On the floor would be my chief of staff, Ron Glen; Brian Manning, who is the Deputy Minister of Executive Council; Dwight Dibben, deputy secretary to cabinet; Roxanna Benoit, deputy chief of policy co-ordination; and Elaine Dougan, who is the executive director of corporate services.

I'll begin with the fiscal overview for 2010-11. Executive Council is one of the 13 departments whose budgets were cut this year to enable government to increase its support of key program areas such as health care during a time of fiscal restraint. The budget for Executive Council is \$31.7 million this year. It's down \$3.7 million from last year. This reduction will mainly be achieved by reducing spending in the final year of the brand initiative by \$3 million. We will also do this by focusing on supporting our brand ambassadors in developing products they can use to help carry Alberta's message to the world. We're also reducing funding for the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, which is delaying recruitment to vacant positions and reducing discretionary spending on things like staff training, travel, hosting, and supplies.

I'd like to now turn to a review of the Executive Council's program areas and priorities as outlined in the business plan. The Executive Council includes my offices in the Legislature and in McDougall Centre in Calgary, the deputy minister's office, the cabinet co-ordination office, the policy co-ordination office, the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, the Agency Governance Secretariat, the protocol office, the administrative support for the office of the Lieutenant Governor, the Alberta Order of Excellence Council, and the Public Affairs Bureau.

Our 2010-13 business plan lays out the following strategic priorities for Executive Council: strengthening agency governance, enhancing policy capacity, continuing the work of the Council for Economic Strategy, implementing the branding initiative, continuing to implement the strategic communications plan across government, and using new social media and technology to enhance communications.

Mr. Chairman, let me put those activities in some context. Alberta is facing industrial and urban development on a scale never seen before. As a government we've had to raise the bar and develop policies to accommodate this development such as the strategic capital plan, the municipal sustainability initiative, and the competitiveness review. We did this because Albertans want economic growth and all the opportunities it brings but not at a cost to the environment or our quality of life.

Our government has worked hard to put this policy framework in place to achieve Albertans' goals. This work could have easily gone out the window with the recession, with short-term economic and budget pressures trumping long-term planning. But leadership isn't about changing directions whenever the wind does. Our plan positions the province to be ready when growth returns. It recognizes the need for Alberta businesses to be globally competitive to attract investment needed to further develop Alberta's resources and does not rely on tax increases. In fact, there will be no tax increases. It gets us back in the black in three years and continues to save for the future.

A couple of comments with respect to the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. I established the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy to provide advice on how we can ensure that Alberta continues to be an innovative and prosperous province where Albertans enjoy a high quality of life built on vibrant communities and a healthy environment. We can't predict what the world will be like in the future, but we can look carefully at the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead in the next few decades.

The council is a group of globally recognized experts that will provide an external, big-picture perspective on our economic future. Through meetings, individual interviews, and consultation with experts in communities of interest it is now developing an understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing our province in a constantly changing global environment and how they will affect our economy, environment, society, and government. Then it will turn its attention to possible opportunities and responses and start figuring out what conditions government should put in place to ensure that Alberta stays focused on her vision of an innovative and prosperous province for this generation and generations to come.

One of the things we know will be important is continuing to promote our province and manage our reputation globally as we recently did at the Olympic Winter Games. You know, we've been criticized for spending money on this, but you can't reach a worldwide audience without spending money. It'll never be cheaper than when the whole world is already next door.

While the naysayers in Alberta were moaning and groaning, let me tell you what others were saying about Alberta's presence at the Olympics. People were calling the Alberta train, and I quote, the best idea Vancouver never had. The *Vancouver Sun* said that with the train the wily Albertans attracted all kinds of media coverage. In fact, we attracted about \$70 million worth of media exposure. Another article, in the *Vancouver Province*, had this to say: "You have to hand it to the Albertans. First, they stole our Olympic train . . . Then they pinched the premier location for their Olympic pavilion. Alberta's Olympic vision . . . is as clear as it is down-to-earth. It's to drum up business for Alberta." A story in the *National Post* said that when they asked a Swedish man what he knew about Alberta, he replied: spirit to achieve, freedom to create.

Yes, we could have saved some money by not being there, but we would have been missing a huge opportunity to promote our province. We as Albertans will never sit on the sidelines when we could be promoting our province and helping to realize its full potential.

I'll stop there, Mr. Chairman, and I'll prepare to take questions from committee members.

3:00

The Deputy Chair: The first speaker is the Leader of the Official Opposition. You have 10 minutes, and the Premier has 10 minutes to respond. Do you wish to combine that time for 20 to go back and forth or keep it separate?

Dr. Swann: With the Premier's permission I'd like to have an

interactive discussion, a few questions, some brief answers, and back and forth if that's acceptable to him, and written responses if it's too short to deal with a question.

Mr. Stelmach: Sure.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Premier, and welcome to the staff. I'd like to introduce my staffperson also, Ryan Gordey, who is our research officer in the Alberta Liberal caucus on health care and several other ministries, including Executive Council.

Executive Council is a very important ministry in any government, and it's essential to provide leadership to the rest of government and to show the way in terms of both leadership and policy and in management and appropriations for the public interest. This ministry is essentially the Premier's office with the addition of the Public Affairs Bureau and in these past couple of years the branding initiative, policy development initiatives, and the new economic advisory committee.

The overriding question for all government spending is value for money, clear goals, monitoring of results, and evaluation of how we can spend better in the long-term public interest. Albertans continue to have concerns about how this government is managing its budget, how it's setting goals, monitoring the implementation of strategies to achieve those goals, and holding itself accountable, providing evidence of value for money, whether it's in health care, education, infrastructure, or any particular role that government has in caring for people and the infrastructure and the services that care for all of us.

The Premier's office clearly, then, sets the tone and the standard for the rest of government, and how responsibly it's managed is a weather vane for the rest of government. Given that half the budget in the Executive Council is related to public communication, it begs important questions about the goals, strategies, and accountability of spending in our communications budget both within Executive Council and how that relates to the rest of communications and public relations in the other ministries.

One of the fundamental questions that the opposition has continued to raise over the years is the extent to which the Public Affairs Bureau, answering to the Premier, is really an important tool of the public and answerable to the public, that messages are indeed conveyed in the public interest to advise and inform and educate and improve the lives of Albertans. Like the questions around the member benefits discussion and our Motion 501, that called for independence of those kinds of decisions that members benefit from and the question of a conflict of interest, the question around the Public Affairs Bureau and the Executive Council has to be: is there a conflict of interest when the major portion of the budget in Executive Council, that related to communications of government services and plans and policies, is directly answerable to the Premier as opposed to the Legislature?

That's a preamble, Mr. Chairman, to address a very ongoing, persistent question that I think Albertans continue to ask us and ask us to represent to this government. I think perhaps I'll ask the Premier to respond to that specifically since it's a fairly overriding and general question. I'd like to hear how, if anything, he would like to reassure Albertans and all representatives that this Public Affairs Bureau is paid out of the public purse and responds to the public interest as opposed to the Premier and the government's interests.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, the Public Affairs Bureau is nonpartisan. It has the responsibility of ensuring that all Albertans are informed on what policies and laws are agreed to by this Assembly

and by government. Albertans deserve very clear, strong information with respect to what government has done in this Legislature and what policies and regulations are implemented. So I think that there is no conflict of interest in terms of the Public Affairs Bureau giving that information out to the public. It's also a function of the executive branch of government, which is not a branch of the Legislative Assembly.

The one thing that I want to say is that you find as you travel through Alberta, that whether it's in advertising in papers in terms of policy direction or new policy or new laws that are implemented, there are always those that either miss the information or have to rely on phoning government for additional information, and these are some of the responsibilities of the Public Affairs Bureau.

Just for additional information, there are 118 FTEs in the branch. Seventy-two are professional communications staff, and these are people that are assigned to communication branches in the departments. On any given day, as you know, there are news releases to co-ordinate, plan announcements, provide communications advice to department officials, and respond to media calls sometimes totalling in the hundreds in one department, depending on the issue. So they do serve a very, very valuable responsibility in government.

Many departments chose to augment their communications branches by adding staff to meet particular needs such as their internal communications. It is entirely up to each department to make that choice and to resource these positions.

Now, in response further, there are 46 FTEs in the Public Affairs Bureau who fill a number of roles, including co-ordinating government communications to and from Albertans for major government initiatives and during public emergencies; planning, co-ordinating government-wide internal communications to employees; managing the government of Alberta website; co-ordinating cross-government standards for all ministry websites; providing advertising consultation and support to ministries and co-ordinating corporate advertising; distributing government news releases and providing media monitoring service to the ministries; and providing technical support for major government news conferences and announcements.

I think, to be very clear, that there is no connection between the bureau and party politics. Partisan political matters are, of course, those that are the domain of the party and its members and not government employees. Like all members of the public service, our bureau employees are guided by a code of conduct and an oath of office.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a bit hard for us to swallow that this kind of budget, this kind of staff, 180 full-time equivalents ultimately reporting directly to the Premier, has no political affiliation or no political agenda. I guess I would ask the Premier again whether he sees any loss of confidence from a public that sees this kind of spending on communications and, instead of having any kind of an independent committee or any kind of a balanced committee overlooking our communications agenda, whether he would not see any merit in changing the perception that this is a vast resource that very much appears to be, even if not true, at the whim and the will of one man who represents one particular party?

For many in this province there's a real disconnect. When he talks about transparency and accountability and open, honest communication, there's a real disconnect with this kind of money, half of his budget, going to the Public Affairs Bureau without any sense of balance in how that communication is being vetted, apart from his own.

3:10

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, I think the hon. member mentioned 180 FTEs. There aren't 180. There are 118 FTEs in the department.

As I said before, this is nonpartisan. This is communicating the policies of the government. It's not party politics. Various parties, no matter what their political stripe, have their own infrastructure to get their message out. These are policies that are passed by the government. Many are debated here in the Legislature, whether it be information with respect to the budget, information to change in policies in health, transportation, any department. So I don't see where there is a conflict of interest.

Dr. Swann: In connection with numbers, then, Mr. Chairman, I would ask the Premier, including Public Affairs Bureau staff and other communications staff with the rest of government: what is the sum total of communications people in this government? I have a directory here that lists all the ministries, and it suggests to me that it's close to actually 220 people in this government that are charged with communicating this government's purposes and services.

Will the Premier also explain how the reporting lines are between communications staff and the Public Affairs Bureau staff? Do the staff report to their respective ministries or deputy ministers, or does the Public Affairs Bureau staff only report directly to Executive Council?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, with respect to the Public Affairs Bureau, like I said before, 118 FTEs. There are additional communications people in departments. These are people that may not all necessarily be right here in the city of Edmonton but may be working for various departments in locations throughout Alberta. As you know, the province is big, and it's necessary to get the information out to individuals living in different parts of the province. I know that within the regional offices Transportation will have some communications people, especially if, you know, there are some road bans going in or changes, perhaps, to a construction schedule, where some roads may be temporarily closed. Those are all part of departmental communications.

I believe I gave a total listing person by person not that long ago through a question, and we'll do the same thing. We'll just itemize all the people, where they work, and we'll get that to the hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Throughout the 2010-11 government estimates – excluding Housing and Urban Affairs, Municipal Affairs, Service Alberta – each ministry has a line item that shows their communications budget. The total for all ministries, including Executive Council and the branding initiative, is \$34.9 million. This is an improvement because it seems the Premier has taken some advice from many of us to reduce government spending on spin. How did the Premier find these efficiencies from the total amount of government spending on communications, and why now? I mean, communications last year went up \$6 million.

Mr. Stelmach: The \$14.3 million budgeted for Public Affairs Bureau represents less than .04 per cent of the 2010-11 spending estimate for the government. If we include the roughly \$15 million that departments have allocated to their communications budgets, that figure is still less than .08 per cent of total spending. If it's less than 1 per cent of total government spending for communications, I think that is pretty efficient given that, you know, every department

has so much to communicate over the course of a year. So I think that has been quite prudent.

Dr. Swann: On page 124 of the Executive Council 2010 business plan under Significant Opportunities and Challenges it states: "Executive Council will enhance policy capacity and cross-ministry collaborations and ensure consistency with overall government strategic direction by facilitating collaboration in strategic planning and policy development." Let me ask the following question, then, using as an example our health care system. Mr. Premier, is there a plan for public health that the public, professionals, and representatives of the public could contribute to, and if so, when can we see an overarching plan for health?

My second question would have to do with the way that health policy has been developed in the last couple of years. There continue to be questions raised about who is developing our health policy. Is it Alberta Health and Wellness? Is it Alberta Health Services? There's more and more confusion around leadership on health and whether we can get access to a plan so that Albertans and professionals can contribute to that plan. In light of the decision not to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton, it seems that this policy decision was made by Alberta Health Services, and the news release that accompanied the decision was released by Alberta Health Services, yet the minister seems to have made a different decision. Which organization is actually responsible?

Again related to health, what measures . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we are with the estimates for Executive Council, not with health.

Dr. Swann: Yeah. I'm referring here to the policy role of Executive Council. How is the policy role in this Executive Council relating to the delivery of a major part of our budget, health care?

The Deputy Chair: As long as it applies to the estimates.

Dr. Swann: Oh, yeah. Very much so.

What measures have been taken through Executive Council to improve and increase policy development capacity with Alberta Health and Wellness? What influence does Executive Council have with health policy decisions? Is the Executive Council briefed on policy decisions before they're made or announced or implemented? How does that work between Executive Council and Alberta health?

Last year in the budget debates for Executive Council the Premier stated: "I'm proud to say that we have the most participation in policy development from our caucus. We have various policy committees. All ministerial recommendations come forward for thorough discussion." Two questions related to that, Mr. Premier: what input did cabinet policy committees have into the decision not to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton, the decision to cut 290 acute-care beds from Edmonton and Calgary, the decision in 2009 to reduce the number of elective surgeries performed in our public hospitals?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you're going to have to direct this to the estimates.

Dr. Swann: Go ahead, Mr. Premier, if you'd like to respond to those.

Mr. Stelmach: In response to the hon. member the ministry sets overall policy. Let's say the policy that health care in this province remains publicly funded. That is a policy. That it's publicly administered. That is a policy. But in terms of the overall responsi-

bility for operational decisions, that is up to the Alberta Health Services Board. The board has a budget that's been allocated to them, and they have to live within that budget and all of the responsibilities that are assigned to the board within the operational side. But the general policy, again I repeat – publicly funded, publicly administered – is the responsibility of the ministry and of government.

Dr. Swann: Just a supplementary, Mr. Premier: were all the above-mentioned health decisions that I mentioned presented to the government caucus as a whole for their debate?

Mr. Stelmach: Once again, they're operational issues. The Alberta Health Services Board is assigned a budget, and they make decisions based on recommendations that come forward to the board by their staff. The board then looks at the recommendations made by staff, and they make the final decisions, and they implement those decisions.

Dr. Swann: Well, I hate to belabour this, but just one further question.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you're going to have to tie this directly to the estimates and not to the policy of the rest of the government.

Dr. Swann: This is Executive Council's role, with all respect.

The Deputy Chair: And their estimates.

3:20

Dr. Swann: I'm asking for clarification about the role of Executive Council with respect to the major budget item in this government. Do you, Mr. Premier, know what the plan is for health care? Did you, for example, make the decision to centralize health through one board and eliminate regional delivery systems?

Mr. Stelmach: Those decisions were made back in the '90s in terms of reducing the number of local hospital boards, health unit boards, et cetera. I think there were about 200 and some-odd individual boards across the province. They were collapsed into a number of regional health authorities. We made the decision to collapse the health authorities plus the other boards – Cancer Board, AADAC; I'm missing one – into one Alberta Health Services Board. That recommendation was brought forward by the minister. It was a policy decision simply to save the overall taxpayer millions of dollars, roughly \$600 million, in costs to the overall government, which streamlined process, removed the need for individual accounting and human relations departments throughout the government.

The Deputy Chair: The time has elapsed for this round of speaking. The 20 minutes have elapsed. Now I'll call the next speaker, please.

Dr. Swann: Is it not true that I have the first hour?

The Deputy Chair: No, you do not. This is estimates. This is not policy field committee. You have the first hour in policy field committee. This is Committee of Supply. You have 10 minutes each, and you can combine the two for 20.

I'll call the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are you going to combine your questions and answers for the two 10s if that's all right with the Premier?

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I will confine this completely to the estimates. I want to talk specifically about some of the specific salaries and specific roles in this specific Executive Council budget, okay? I'm not going to go off somewhere else. I just want to make that clear up front. I need to understand the role of the chief of staff, and I need to better understand the role of the deputy chief of staff, so that means asking some very specific questions.

First off, I guess the thing that strikes me the most when you look at these numbers is that for a government that claims to be fiscally responsible, claims to be fiscally conservative, I just cannot understand how that jives with some of the salaries that are being paid to Executive Council members. For example, the Deputy Minister of Executive Council: just before you came into office, Mr. Premier, the salary that was paid here in Alberta for that position was \$283,000. Today it's \$530,000. It's just short of being double. Comparatively, the clerk of the Privy Council for our nation makes \$427,000. I don't see how on earth that number is justifiable. It's no offence to the people making the salary. It's just: how on earth is that justifiable if we're trying to be fiscally conservative here? I'm not saying that they're not doing a good job, bad job, or medium job.

Secondly, if you go to the chief of staff, \$232,000 in 2004; six years later it's almost \$400,000, a massive increase. If you look at the southern Alberta office director, in 2004 again we go to \$118,000; now it's more than double that at \$252,000. And this is an amazing one. The director of communications used to make \$66,000. We've all heard of the complaints about communications in this government. It's all communications' fault. This year it's \$216,000. That's almost four times the amount – four times. It's just amazing to me that we could even make an attempt to justify that number.

I guess the first line of questioning is: how are these salaries justified, especially given the economic climate that we're in today?

Mr. Stelmach: The question is raised with respect to pay and bonus to Executive Council. For a matter of record with the two positions, Deputy Minister of Executive Council and the chief of staff, in terms of showing leadership, well before other provinces picked up on the idea – and, indeed, the federal government in the latest budget said: well, we're just going to freeze all of MPs' and ministers' salaries this particular coming budget year. The government made that decision two years ago. MLAs' and ministerial salaries have been frozen.

In terms of the Deputy Minister of Executive Council the year before last we said that the bonuses will be eliminated, so for this year the deputy of Executive Council sees the elimination of compensation of \$80,000 – that was the amount of the bonus – plus a 10 per cent salary reduction. The deputy of Executive Council will see his compensation reduced by \$112,000. The chief of staff, a 10 per cent reduction, which is \$25,000, plus the elimination of the bonus, which is around \$76,000: that's a reduction of \$101,000. So the total for the chief of staff and Deputy Minister of Executive Council is \$213,000.

All management salaries in government have been frozen. All bonuses are cancelled. That, in itself, is a reduction of approximately \$1.4 million in compensation cuts. Previous to that as well the Premier announced a reduction of \$12,000 some-odd dollars a year in salary reduction, and cabinet ministers took a salary reduction of about, I believe, \$6,600 a year.

The government has shown great leadership, and in fact, from what I gather, some of the other jurisdictions are following the leadership of the province.

Now, some history in terms of how the compensation was decided. This was decided a number of years ago when our deputy ministers were quite low compared to other jurisdictions in terms of their total compensation. The minister responsible for human resources – and this was a number of years ago – and our previous Premier put together a corporate human resources committee that was chaired by Eric Newell, Charlie Fischer, Gail Surkan, Gerry Protti, and the Deputy Minister of Executive Council. It came forward to cabinet at the time in terms of the salary range and also all of the other items that will be the total compensation package for the deputy ministers.

There is a comparison to other jurisdictions. I don't have it here, but we're in the range of what some of the provinces pay. Obviously, some provinces are smaller, and other provinces have different rates of compensation which are, of course, much more than what we have. We're kind of in the median in that particular range for deputy ministers.

Now, when the member talked about the deputy minister, this position and the numbers he's referring to was occupied by two individuals during that year, and there was an additional cash benefit, which was the vacation payout of \$54,204, which is according to the contract. As I said, two individuals, April 1 to September 28, '08, and the second from the 29th of September to March 31 of '09.

3:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Thank you for those explanations, Premier.

On the question of the salaries I think everyone in Alberta expects, and rightfully so, that as the Premier you're the boss, you're the leader, you're the head of the Executive Council. I think that for a lot of people it's a contradiction and a little unsettling that your chief of staff as well as the Deputy Minister of Executive Council are making so much more than yourself. That doesn't seem to jibe. I mean, I think a lot of us here have been in different businesses. The guy who's making the decisions at the end of the day should be the guy who's the highest paid, and that's not the case in our government. I wonder if the Premier would address that.

I'm not asking that he, and I don't think he would, raise his salary to above what they're making, but at the very least create a hierarchy, that I think the people of Alberta would understand, where the Premier is the leader, is making the decisions. He's the one that's been democratically elected, and therefore he should be making the highest salary and not two or three or four or five bureaucrats.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, that is the same right across the country of Canada. I know that the Prime Minister isn't paid more than his deputies. In fact, he might even be paid less than the assistant deputy ministers and other senior officials in government. I don't know what the remuneration was for some of our municipal leaders across Alberta, but I do know that most of the CEOs and CAOs that operate municipalities were paid much more than the highest ranking elected official, which was the mayor.

Mr. Anderson: Well, would it not be a good example, then, to the rest to rein back? I mean, we spend more in our bureaucracy than any other province per capita in the country. Wouldn't it be a good way to show leadership at this point and lower those higher paid staff, you know, the bureaucratic, nonelected, executive-paid

members, maybe rein those salaries back a little bit to something that makes a little bit more sense to the average Albertan? I mean, we're all in public service. You know, you've set an example. I personally don't believe that the Premier's salary is overly exorbitant for the amount of work that you do, but shouldn't, then, the people that report to you be making less or, at least, on par but certainly less than yourself? If that was the type of leadership we had across the board, I think that we might foster more of a culture of public service rather than a culture of entitlement, which I kind of see existing right now. Is that something that you'd be willing to look at?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not going to ask people that are under contract in this province across all of government to take what would be significant reductions in management positions, in senior positions in government, and get paid less than what the Premier gets paid or the ministers. In fact, I don't know what issues there would be to the current contracts we would have in place. But, you know, that's a matter that we can debate.

I have great confidence and pride in our civil service in this province as a minister over the last number of years, no matter what ministry I served in. I started in agriculture, and I remember attending my first ministerial FPT, federal-provincial, meeting. When it came to policy, all other provinces seemed to look to Alberta to take a leadership role, whether it be on crop insurance, farm programs, food safety.

In Transportation we were the first province – and, again, leadership and buy-in through our civil service – to reduce I believe from 2,100 or 2,200 individuals down to about 700. We outsourced project management. We outsourced engineering. We outsourced maintenance. That was a significant change in the way transportation services were delivered. There was a lot of pride in the Transportation department, and that pride was invested by Albertans. We've made the changes, and in order to attract good quality people, we've got to be in the median at least.

I've always said that we may not be paying the highest as compared to other jurisdictions, but on the other hand we do have the lowest personal income taxes. That, to me, is an added benefit because no matter how much a person earns, they pay a flat 10 per cent. I believe we still continue to have one of the largest personal income tax exemptions compared to other provinces. That, again, is another benefit, but that benefit is for all Albertans.

Mr. Anderson: I didn't really want to discuss the competitiveness of our province right now, and I won't. I would love to have that discussion, but I'm going to try to remain with the estimates here.

We spent an awful lot of money and we're planning to spend \$7 million more, I believe, on the rebranding initiative. Personally, and no offence to the people that worked on it, I think the new brand is terrible. I think that it doesn't reflect what this province stands for. As a people, thanks to the leadership of the previous Premier, I would say, too, we had come up with a slogan: the Alberta advantage. That's something that really defined us as a province. It's something that people not only all over Canada knew but also all over North America.

To come and change that to Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve, which essentially no one knows unless they're following politics or following the debate on it, I just don't see how the money was well spent that went into that rebranding initiative when we have so many other ways that it could have been spent; for example, on getting our message about the oil sands out to the world a little bit more. Maybe that could have been spent there. Or, you know, it's obviously well documented the health care issues that we have. It's well docu-

mented the budget deficit that we have. It just seemed to me that not only was this a waste of money or not the best use of money; the product that we got out of it was extremely poor. No one identifies with it. It's a bit of a joke if you go around and talk to people. With that, I mean, could we not save \$7 million or reallocate it by moving on to something else rather than this Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve slogan that we've come up with?

Mr. Stelmach: I expect that member to not agree because he's in the opposition. He's expressed an opinion, and he has a right to express that opinion in the House.

Just a little more information in terms of the spending details on the branding initiative. The budget that was introduced in '08-09, the first year, was \$5 million; the second year, '09-10, was \$10 million; then \$10 million in 2010-11, for a total of \$25 million. We did not spend the full amount budgeted in '08-09 or in '09-10. We reduced the budget in 2010-11, again, \$10 million down to \$7 million.

What is the money being used for? It has been spent in a number of different particular areas. The brand was launched in March 2009. We ran TV and international print ads to support the invest in Alberta message. We've also used some of the funds to develop the brand website. To date there have been more than 160,000 visits to the brand website, over 36,000 viewings of our videos on YouTube, 660 Alberta photos posted on Flickr, and growing numbers, of course, on Facebook and Twitter accounts. Two-thirds of those visitors are consistently from outside of Canada. In total we've had visitors from 148 different countries. So, you know, we can debate whether the money is well spent. I do know that it also includes some investment in contracts that we have with two U.S. firms as well to get the message out in terms of environment and some of our advocacy efforts in Washington, DC. That's all part of the branding process.

3:40

I will say that through a lot of the work that was done, a lot of polling, asking questions of Albertans, the Alberta advantage served Alberta very well for a number of years, but it kind of lost its appeal to many. As a result, we had to rebrand the province of Alberta.

Given the comments we've had in Vancouver at the Olympics and, certainly, the number of hits on the website, I believe that we're on the right track, and we'll keep monitoring. We're going to rely on our branding ambassadors to do more. It's really been picked up by schools, universities, businesses throughout Alberta that are using the logo and are now promoting this with whoever they do business either in Canada or the United States or around the world.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: How much time do I have left?

The Deputy Chair: Twenty.

Mr. Anderson: Twenty seconds? Okay. Well, I'll defer my questions till later.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to go back on some of the questions I asked earlier to the Premier about setting an example of responsible spending. How can he justify in the last several years 200 to 400 per cent increases in his senior staff's

income? How does he respond to people living in poverty, on AISH, women who are unemployed, men unemployed, students who can't get into postsecondary education? This flies in the face of responsible spending and a reasonable leadership style. How do you respond to Albertans with 200 to 400 per cent increases under your watch?

Mr. Stelmach: As I said earlier, I read the numbers into the record, if he wants me to do that again.

We have shown leadership as a government going through a very difficult economic situation. We've asked all our management people to forgo a part of their compensation, which was their bonus, and this is part, quite frankly, of an agreement that was reached many years ago when we fell behind in managerial salaries compared to other jurisdictions. As I've said, it was a private-sector committee that came forward with recommendations to at least put us in the median of other provinces.

Given that we're going through a difficult period and we had to find a considerable amount of money in in-year spending in '09-10 and '08-09, all bonuses were cancelled, and of course all managerial salaries were frozen. That's two years before anybody even thought of doing anything in that particular area in any other jurisdiction, and that in itself is \$1.4 million in compensation cuts. I'll remind this House that that was done on a voluntary basis. There was an agreement in place, and our people did that on a voluntary basis. So, you know, I commend our public sector for doing that, which has allowed us to reach our targets and balance on the operational side, especially when it comes to finding dollars in various departments to balance heading into the year-end.

Every year the compensation committee asks the CHR, the human resource people, to review our compensation across Canada, and as I said before, we are in the median. Again, hats off to all of the managers and the people that had a bonus coming to them that voluntarily said: we will not accept the bonus for the year to try to reach our targets for that particular year during a period of economic downturn.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't think that sits very well with Albertans, and I dare say that the nonconfidence in this government and this Premier is well reflected in that kind of response, that doesn't address the massive increases that he oversaw in his bureaucracy. This is part of what Albertans disdain about public service, that this is no longer public service; it's people at the public trough. A lack of leadership in this respect is part of what you're going to deal with for the next couple of years, I'm afraid.

On page 125 of the Executive Council business plan strategic priority 3 is to continue the establishment of an economic strategy, namely the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. A few questions related to this council. How long is this council going to be in place? What concrete gains has the Premier seen from this council? What decisions have been made? Will the Premier make public any reports and recommendations he's received from this council in line with strategic priority 1, which is accountability and transparency? Finally, how many meetings has the Premier had with the council in the past year?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Sure. With respect to the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, as I said in my opening remarks, we've asked world experts, world leaders in various areas of expertise under the leadership of Dr. Emerson to identify major forces and trends in the

world economy and what Alberta has to do to present itself, position itself in an ever-changing world economy, let's say from the 2010 to 2040 period. The Alberta Economic Development Authority looks at the short term. The Alberta Economic Development Authority will be working with the council in terms of the short term – you know, 2010, 2015, 2018 – but we've asked the council to look much further ahead and see what is it that we have to do in a number of areas, whether it be in education and technology, technology transfer, obviously commercialization of that technology, health, our own personal health, what strategies we can put together.

I've had one face-to-face meeting with the chair. The chair has used, of course, various ways, through the Internet, working with the council members, and they have put together an interim report. They will be getting together in Edmonton at the end of March to review it.

They will be, again, consulting with the public and with people that have good, far-reaching ideas, and they will collate those and bring them forward to government. That report will be made public. It is something Albertans want to see, and they will have, of course, the ability to respond to the report because we're in this together.

We've seen some huge global economic shifts. We're going to see tremendous competition for investment and for people in the world, and we've got to position this province correctly. It may mean, of course, ideas on how we change some of the current policies not only within Alberta but in Canada and offer suggestions on how we can work with other provinces and our federal government to improve Alberta's and Canada's position.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I guess I would ask the Premier: if he was spending a million dollars of his own money, would he have been more inclined to meet with this committee over a year and find out what they're doing and what influence it could have and should have on current decision-making? I'm surprised that there's only been one face-to-face meeting over this period.

In last year's budget the Premier stated that the total amount of funding for this council was \$2 million, which was an increase of a million dollars to cover remuneration, travel expenses, and other costs. I have several questions around this \$2 million. Is the total amount of funding to the council still at \$2 million for fiscal 2010-11? Would this \$2 million in spending be found under line item 1.0.1? What is the reason why there are not more specifics given around this spending, and what accounting has the Premier for this? Is it all on remuneration, travel, and consulting fees? How much of the total funding to the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy goes to consultants outside those individuals on the Council?

3:50

Mr. Stelmach: Perhaps a little bit of background on the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. The council, as I said, is chaired by David Emerson, who actually was born in Grande Prairie, was with the forestry industry, and served as an elected official with the federal government. The council has 12 members, many national and international in stature and each a globally recognized expert in their field.

The members were nominated by community leaders from across Alberta. We had three nomination committees that volunteered their time and brought names forward. Then the committee selected whom they thought, you know, should be appointed to the council and gave their ideas. All people that are selected have global experience, are respected strategic thinkers, and represent a broad

range of experience with the major economic sectors of importance to Alberta.

Remuneration for the council follows the guidelines laid out in the public agencies governance framework.

Now, in addition to David Emerson – and I'd like to put this in the record – in terms of the membership, from the United Kingdom Professor Sir John Bell, who is a professor of medicine at the University of Oxford; Professor Jennifer Welsh, a professor in international relations, University of Oxford; Clive Mather, former president and CEO of Shell Canada, now chairman of Iogen Corp. From the United States Juan Enriquez, managing director of Excel Medical Ventures in Boston, Massachusetts. From across Canada Elyse Allan, president and CEO of GE Canada; David Dodge, who is a senior adviser for Bennet Jones in Ottawa; Courtney Pratt, the former president and CEO of Stelco, now the chairman and CEO of the Toronto Region Research Alliance. From Alberta we have Bob Brawn, who is the chair of the Alberta Economic Development Authority; James Gray, better known as Jim Gray, Brookfield Asset Management; Anne McLellan, a former cabinet minister now with Bennet Jones; and Lorne Taylor, who is the chair of the Alberta research institute.

In terms of the compensation, the chair is paid \$50,000 a year; members are paid \$20,000 a year plus \$1,000 for each day on council business as per the guidelines. I think the question was: is it included in the budget line item? Yes, it is. It's in the office of the Premier and Executive Council.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to know whether we're getting value for money. It's not clear at all from what the Premier has said that we have any capacity for measuring the output from this committee, value for money. What is the total budget this year, Mr. Premier, and are we getting value from this?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes, we are getting value. I mean, very rarely do you have people that have dedicated their time for the amount of money that we are paying them, that come from different corners and parts of the world to give advice to the Premier of the province of Alberta. These are people that, I'm sure, get paid much, much more than what they're paid according to our guidelines and are willing to take the time and help Alberta take a leadership role in the country of Canada in terms of where we want to be by 2040. Not very often do you get people like this just by sheer invite, sending them a letter to help and participate in a committee like this.

There is a lot of research that is being done. Many have asked for further research in terms of the background information. I know that this is very, very important for Alberta because, as I said before, there is a huge global shift. We've always relied on the United States as our number one trading partner. We've seen that economy diminish somewhat. Asia, of course, China, India are moving forward in the growth of the economy. There are some issues, obviously, in Europe. We've got to be ahead of the curve, and this is definitely going to give us the advice on how we can reach our full potential.

Now, some of the things, of course, in terms of the council are taking an account of Alberta's current natural resources and built assets, looking at the strengths of Alberta's people and its institutions, identifying the major forces, as I said earlier, and trends shaping the world around us from 2010 to 2040. It's reviewing the implications of major external and internal forces and trends on Alberta's economy, society, and government. Just briefly, Mr. Chair, what's happening in the Middle East in terms of some of the issues tied to oil supply, peace, what could happen between, you know, Iran and some of the other Middle Eastern countries and the

Emirates: there are some very sensitive issues now. We have to ensure that we're in the right position to deal with the ever-changing circumstances.

Now, the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, the budget overview. In the first year we had allocated a million dollars; the actual was \$766,000. In '09-10 the budget is forecast to be at \$1.9 million. I don't know what that will be, but it will be less than that. Then for '10-11 it'll be about \$1.6 million, a reduction of \$285,000.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, it's kind of discouraging that we ask for brief answers and clear responses, and we get the same runaround. Albertans want to know how this money is being spent and what value we're getting from it, what decisions are changing as a result of this council. There is also no indication of how long this spending is going to go on. I guess some of us get frustrated by the lack of clarity and the lack of brevity, the discussion around world economics as opposed to answering the questions specifically.

To move on to the branding initiative, page 189 of government estimates shows that the estimated spending for the branding initiative is \$7 million in this year and that \$9.66 million was forecasted for the '09-10 fiscal. None was spent in '08-09. But page 195 of the 2009 government estimates shows that it was forecast for branding spending of \$5 million in '08-09. Can the Premier clarify why this year's estimate does not include the \$5 million that was budgeted to be spent on the branding in '08-09? Was that \$5 million budgeted not spent? Is it included in the Public Affairs Bureau line? What is the reason for that \$5 million discrepancy?

Secondly, of the \$7 million that was budgeted for the '10-11 year, how much of that funding is going towards consulting costs?

If some of these are not readily available, I would appreciate a written response.

On page 128 of the Executive Council business plan there are performance measures for the entire branding initiative under development, stating, "A measure to test awareness and recognition of the brand is currently under development." To the Premier: how is the Premier going to actually test awareness and recognition of the Alberta brand? This performance measure was under development last year as well, with the initiative expected to be finished in the '10-11 fiscal year. Isn't having a performance measure developed for '11-12 a little too late? Isn't this simply a post hoc justification for what was projected to be a three-year spending of \$25 million? Will the Premier commit that this performance measure will be replaced by a complete cost-benefit analysis in next year's business plan? He needs to show tangible benefits from this \$25 million of public dollars investment.

On page 190 of government estimates, line 3.0.1, the branding initiative shows a reduction of \$3 million for '10-11. What was originally budgeted as \$10 million is now \$7 million. To the Premier. I would first like to thank the Premier for taking the advice of the opposition and cutting this spending on a very questionable initiative. Will the Premier explain what was cut out of the plans for that branding initiative, and is this reduction because of a decrease in advertising dollars? Is it a decrease in consulting costs? Where did that \$3 million get cut? If the Premier managed to find \$3 million in savings, could he explain why these were not found in the two years prior in the program? Is the Premier planning on spending the \$3 million saved this year in '11-12? Surely that \$3 million could be better spent on core services and policy development.

4:00

Will the Premier give some examples of the performance benchmarks that are under consideration for measuring the success of the program? Will it be the total amount of investment in the

province? Will it be increases in tourism dollars? How does the Premier propose to measure success of this program?

Will the Premier answer how much of the \$7 million being spent on the branding initiative will be spent through the Public Affairs Bureau? To what extent is the branding initiative handled through this bureau, and has the role changed over the last two years since the initiative started? Will the Premier provide the list of all consultants that have had a part in the branding campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I don't know how good my memory is. There are about 50 questions in there.

Again, I don't know why the hon. member said that I'm going around the detail. I was very clear. I read out the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy budget overview. In '08-09 we budgeted a million, we spent \$766,000; in '09-10, \$1.9 million. The totals come in for '10-11, which will be the final year of the council. We're estimating \$1.6 million, which would be a reduction of approximately \$285,000. All of the council's reports will be completed, and we'll bring the last report and all of the recommendations to government at that particular time. Then the council will cease to exist. I can't be any clearer than that.

Going back to the branding initiatives budget – and I think I answered this in previous questions to the previous member – '08-09 was \$5 million, '09-10 was \$10 million, and \$10 million in 2010-11, for \$25 million. We did not spend the full amount targeted in '08-09 or in '09-10, and we have reduced the budget in '10-11 from \$10 million to \$7 million.

The Deputy Chair: I call the Leader of the Official Opposition for the next set of questions for 20 minutes and after that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I look forward to the written responses to those questions, Mr. Premier. I didn't expect you to have some of those details, but I did expect a few answers.

With respect to board governance page 125 of the Executive Council 2010 business plan states that the number one strategic priority is to strengthen agency governance. In the October '09 Auditor General's report the Auditor recommended that the Ministry of the Treasury Board increase the transparency of termination benefits. Page 160 of the 2010 fiscal plan shows that the government's response to this recommendation is under review. Further questions to the Premier: what is the reason for this recommendation not being accepted from the start, the Auditor's recommendation to review and make more transparent termination benefits?

The implication that the Auditor General outlined if this recommendation is not accepted is that there is a lack of oversight, unawareness of contractual obligations, risk of overpayment, and damage to the corporate reputation of his ministry. Surely the Premier is concerned about this. This recommendation is important across all government boards but especially Alberta Health Services, an organization that controls \$9 billion of spending.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we will work on the estimates. If you can find the line item for Health Services in the estimates, we'll work with that. Otherwise, Health Services will be debated in the policy field committee. They could certainly have a lot of detail in there.

Dr. Swann: Sir, I'm looking for policy direction from this Premier with respect to recommendations for fiscal management.

The Deputy Chair: And we're talking about the Executive Council estimates.

Dr. Swann: And how they are using that budget to direct the spending of other departments, especially the Auditor General's recommendation.

Let me try again. Accepting this recommendation would tie in perfectly with your priority, Mr. Premier, to improve governance, accountability, and transparency of all of government and its agencies. When can we expect to see full disclosure of executive termination benefits, another recommendation related to the importance across all government boards of this accountability and transparency? Does the Premier not see the need for change in this area?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm going to go back to the branding initiative, and then I'll do the question on the response to the Auditor General because there was a comment made that I didn't answer the questions. I'm going to again go through item by item on the branding initiative budget overview, and hopefully there's somebody there taking some notes so they have the answer. If not, then you can read *Hansard* the following day.

Branding initiative budget overview. The budget amount in 2008-09 was \$5 million. The actual was \$3,678,908. Now, spending in the first year of the brand initiative covered the development and launch of the new brand. What did we spend money on? We included extensive research in Alberta, nationally, and internationally; development and testing of the creative elements of the proposed brand; development and testing of the brand campaign; province-wide TV, print, and radio advertising to introduce the new brand.

The next year, '09-10, \$10 million; published forecast, \$9.6 million. Spending in the second year supports implementation of the new brand; support for Alberta's venues at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games; U.S. advocacy consultation; developing videos of Alberta/Albertans to convey consistent messages about Alberta as a place for people realizing possibilities; designing, producing, and installing brand pageantry at strategic locations around the province, purchasing promotional items, all to improve awareness of Alberta's identity; creating and placing ads to support an invest-in-Alberta message; in evaluating brand awareness.

Now, the 2010-11 estimates, \$7 million. Funding for the final year of the initiative will primarily go towards ambassador engagement and community development. It's working with brand ambassadors to identify key opportunities for brand development and promotion; developing high-quality materials for brand ambassadors to support their marketing communications about Alberta's immigration, employment, investment, and tourism potential; directly advocating our story to decision-makers in government, business, and policy leaders in Canada and around the world; promoting Alberta at conferences in targeted markets; creating and running advertising campaigns and telling Alberta's story nationally and internationally; and enhancing albertabrand.com and other online communications. That is the complete overview of the branding initiative budget.

Now, with respect to the Auditor General and the executive compensation, many of the contracts that were terminated, Mr. Chairman – and this is not an excuse, just a matter of record that a lot of these contracts were entered into well before I was sworn in as the Premier. These are contracts that were entered into by various boards and agencies, whether it be Health Services, some of the other Crown corporations that we have, or agencies that receive funding from the government to deliver services. It was up to those

boards to reach reasonable contract negotiations and, I would say, reasonable compensation for those that might have not had their contract renewed or might have been otherwise removed.

The Auditor does make good suggestions, and we're looking at formalizing guidelines and also bringing this forward to government for final approval in terms of how we can put some objectives in place to make sure that within, again, a reasonable amount of dollars boards, agencies, and those that work for government have either in legislation or in regulation terms of choice based on what the responsibility is of the individual, of course, in a particular agency and a reasonable clause in the contract that would be paid upon termination.

There were, I believe, contracts that were entered into in the past that we did not see through government, the contracts, because we left it up to the authorities to make those decisions. That will change, and we're looking at coming up with a model that we can apply to all government agencies and Crown corporations so that we meet the recommendations of the Auditor General so that they would be reasonable in nature in the future.

4:10

Dr. Swann: Well, I think it has become clear over the last few years, Mr. Chairman, that Albertans are quite dismayed by the lack of a systematic, consistent, businesslike approach to managing the public purse in this province, and this is another example of where we're slowly, slowly, slowly facing the reality that we are failing in basic business practices.

Page 126 of the Executive Council business plan has the performance measure: percentage satisfaction of policy co-ordination office clients with products and services. The last measurement here was 85 per cent satisfaction. Can the Premier explain how this measure was actually taken and which clients this measure refers to? Is it related to arm's-length government agencies, boards, and commissions, or does this refer to satisfaction of other government ministries? If it is measuring the ministries' satisfaction with his department, is this measure not misleading? Surely government ministries will be reluctant to show dissatisfaction with the Premier's role.

On page 128 of the Executive Council business plan there's a breakdown of expenses by core business, a total of \$10.3 million for policy development. For "help government . . . communicate with Albertans" there's a total of \$21 million. This \$21 million, again, relates to the Premier's message, the government's message, with only \$10 million spent on good public policy. We're spending more on spin than actually on policy. What is the Premier's explanation for year after year pouring more money into advertising, public relations, relative to policy development and policy spending?

Mr. Stelmach: This government has undertaken a number of items that have been put, perhaps, on the back burner for a number of years, ensuring that we are in the position to see and acknowledge the growth that's happening in the province and moving forward on a number of initiatives. They can be anywhere from land-use framework to issues tied to any of the pieces of legislation that we passed in the House, on transmission, for instance, or some of the changes we made in transportation, education, of course, postsecondary. All of those things require a fair amount of communication with the public, and that is why we continue to give as much information as we can to the Alberta public. We have done a lot as a government over the last three years; there's no doubt about it.

I just want to go back to the other item raised in terms of the Auditor General. Sometimes in the response from the hon. member

it's like, you know, this is a simple undertaking. Well, there are contracts in place at the moment with respect to some of the agencies, and we're looking at a format for guidelines in the final approval process that we could post on the secretariat website. These will be regulations under the Public Agencies Governance Act or a combination of various forms to communicate to our boards and agencies in terms of the private-sector compensation.

Treasury Board is also reviewing compensation for various management positions and the termination benefits and some of the salaries that are paid. We'll continue to work on a disclosure directive that will be posted on the web, and we will achieve the Auditor General's recommendation. But it does take time to get there because, as I said, there are current contracts in place, and we have to work through those to make sure that at the end of the day we've found a balance in terms of attracting the best people yet ensuring that they're paid within a reasonable amount of the median in the country of Canada.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: No more questions.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to ask the Premier some questions on his estimates. I think the first question I have has to do with what changes the Premier has made with respect to senior officials in his office since he became the Premier. Can he outline who the senior people are in his office and what they do?

Mr. Stelmach: I believe I gave a total accounting in the questions earlier, but I'll go through it again as soon as I find my notes here.

With respect to the Executive Council we have individuals that have responsibilities in various areas, from policy co-ordination to operation of the office, and of course the office has a number of responsibilities. We have, of course, a very talented team of people working in the executive office. The work they do is essential to the operation of my office. These positions are unique and order in council appointments, which are not subject to the standard recruitment process. We've not added any new positions but have made some changes to the players and to the duties of a number of staff. These sorts of adjustments are made in any office as you move forward and move people around. I know that all members across the way have also made similar changes over time.

The recent changes include updated duties for Elan MacDonald, the deputy chief of staff responsible for policy; George Samoil, who's the deputy chief of staff, operations; the new communications director, Cam Hantiuk; the new director of media relations, Jerry Bellikka; the new executive assistant, Jason Ennis; the new deputy secretary to cabinet, Dwight Dibben; Roxanna Benoit, moving to deputy chief of policy co-ordination; and the new managing director for the Public Affairs Bureau, Lee Funke.

Now, I believe I read into the record – the question, I think, also was in terms of what compensation was paid or the changes in the compensation package. Again, we showed leadership in this area very early as government and as this Assembly. Government MLAs' and all MLAs' salaries were frozen for two years. That was two years ahead of anybody else that took the position to freeze those salaries. When it came to all management salaries, they were all frozen. All bonuses as part of the compensation package were cancelled. That is about \$1.4 million in compensation costs.

For the two senior officials. For the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, once again, a 10 per cent salary reduction, which was \$32,000, and a bonus of \$80,000, which was cancelled, so that's a reduction of \$112,000. For the chief of staff a 10 per cent reduction, \$25,000, plus the bonus elimination of \$76,000, so that's \$101,000. The total for the chief of staff and the deputy, in reduction of just those two areas, was \$213,000.

Once again, the bonuses were part of the compensation package, and all management staff came forward voluntarily in the government's drive to reduce costs. In a year when we really got hit with this totally unprecedented economic downturn, the team came together.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

4:20

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I apologize if that question was redundant, but when there's an hour and 20 minutes of questions ahead of you on a small budget like this, you're going to cover sometimes the same ground a little bit.

My next question has to do with the branding initiative. I was looking in the Executive Council annual report and the business plan and so on trying to determine if there is, in fact, some way to evaluate the branding initiative and whether or not the money that's been spent on it has been successful. I mean, we may each have our personal opinions about whether this is a good brand or a bad brand, but the real question is: is its effectiveness being measured? How many people in Alberta know the brand, like the brand? What does it mean to them? What about, then, outside the province and internationally? How effective is the brand being? The question is: what are the measures of this brand? What are the results?

Mr. Stelmach: A good question from the hon. member. This is a significant initiative in terms of rebranding the province of Alberta. I think that, in all honesty, it's sometimes difficult to measure, especially in an economic downturn, but perhaps it was the best time to rebrand Alberta, when no one predicted this economic downturn, and we came with a new brand for the province to be new, fresh, not only within the country of Canada but within the North American continent and, indeed, the world.

The campaign was implemented in March '09, and the evaluation is critical. There is an evaluation process currently under way to measure the response, and again it comes in various forms: polling, asking Albertans, looking at which sectors of business in Alberta have done better with the new brand, how it's been accepted by what we call brand ambassadors, how they've implemented that in their advertising of whatever particular product.

Now, the other measurement is difficult because it's an open brand. It's not only government; it's open to everyone. You know, a school board can use it. Maybe some trucking firm can use it. Who knows? Maybe there's a sausage maker there someplace that's using the brand in terms of getting their product into other markets around the world. A good example is that Travel Alberta has accepted the brand, and they've used that in the advertising across Canada into North America and indeed some of the markets in the world.

Of course, we wrapped the *Rocky Mountaineer* train in our brand, and it has again proven to be very effective. You know, the fact that *Rocky Mountaineer* has chosen to keep the train wrapped till the end of October is going to give us additional advertising dollars. But it's always difficult to measure, and I will say to the hon. member that we'll have more information on this in terms of the evaluation process.

It's difficult, you know, even when you're advertising in the

paper, to know if it's that particular ad that got you the requested sales, or was there some other means of getting your name out there that has attracted more business? But I feel comfortable in the brand. It's certainly been accepted by so many of our brand ambassadors, and they're using it quite effectively in advertising their product.

Mr. Mason: I would ask the Premier, then, if the criteria for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the brand and the money that's been spent on rebranding the province are going to be made available specifically. I don't want you to get up because you'll take too long to answer that.

The next question I have has to do with Public Affairs Bureau. What I'm asking about: I see on page 194 of the estimates that there are 118 full-time equivalent positions with the PAB, and the Public Affairs Bureau budget is \$14.3 million. The question I have is: how much other communications work does the government do through the contracting of external firms, and where is the budget for that located? Is it located in the PAB budget, or is it located in the various departmental budgets?

Mr. Stelmach: With respect to contracts, I know that for any external contracts that are offered to anybody outside of government, those figures will be in the blue book, and we can certainly get some target numbers for the hon. member. Those are published, I believe, every three months and will communicate to Albertans in terms of what money is spent on consultants, especially in this particular area.

The hon. member was right: there are 118 FTEs. I didn't get an opportunity to compare – there had been some comparisons thrown at us earlier – in terms of what other governments do in this particular area. For our neighbours to the west the 2009-10 budget for the B.C. government's Public Affairs Bureau is \$28.8 million, which includes 223 FTEs, so it's double what our budget is in that particular area.

Now, are there additional people within government that are communicating? Yes. There are those in various ministries that are in different corners and parts of Alberta. I used the example where in one particular area for a transportation network – let's say Grande Prairie – there would be a person responsible for communicating to the public when the highway road bans will be. They might talk about the new weights and measures in that particular area as a result of spring breakup, will be communicating with the oil and gas industry in terms of rig movement and when new bans may be put into place.

The staffing for the Public Affairs Bureau. Of the 118 full-time equivalents, 72 are professional communications staff. These are seconded to ministries who plan and implement communications initiatives. They provide a range of communications services in ministries, including communications planning and advice, writing, editing, responding to media and public inquiries.

Nine staff develop communications for our long-term strategic plan and priority initiatives; co-ordinate government communications for major initiatives, public emergencies; support internal government communications. Six staff provide advertising consultation and support to ministries, co-ordinate corporate advertising, and manage the branding initiative. Eighteen staff provide communications support services to ministries, including websites, news release distribution, electronic media monitoring, technical services for news conferences. Thirteen staff provide corporate services to Executive Council and the bureau, including human resources, finance, administration, business planning, annual reports, records management, and FOIP. This also includes the PAB's managing director's office.

We put the blue book online, so it's definitely searchable. I know the member can look up any of the items, but if you're interested in any one particular area, they can certainly assist you in getting that information. I do want to say that we've certainly moved a long direction positively in being more open and transparent with our airplane manifests, ministerial expenses posted on the website. We also have of course introduced a lobbyist registry.

4:30

All of these things have happened over the last couple of years, again, in consultation with the Assembly here on the lobbyist registry. But the other, in terms of posting all of the information on the website, it was, of course, a move by me to be more open and transparent and just put it out there. It's amazing now that anybody can just pick up who went where, on what plane, and on what day. All of a sudden we don't get the kind of headlines that we used to before.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Open and transparent is good, so is briefer.

I want to ask about the council for economic strategy. I know that this has also been covered, but just for my benefit I wonder if the Premier can tell us what the deliverable is on the council for economic strategy. Is there a specific report with specific recommendations that has been provided to the Premier here?

Mr. Stelmach: The council is chaired by Dr. David Emerson. The council includes a number of very high profile expert people in a number of different areas that we've asked to serve on this council that live in different parts of the world, in Canada, and in the United States. Their role here is to put together an overview of what Alberta has to do to be in the best position by, let's say, from 2010 to 2040 but certainly from 2020 to 2040 given some of the huge global economic shifts and the competition that we're seeing today for people and for investment.

I've had one face-to-face meeting with the chair. Towards the end of the month the council will be here in Edmonton. They've always had meetings but through the Internet so that it would minimize travelling, which saves a fair amount of money. They're building a report in a number of key areas.

Our goal here is to drive Alberta to be a knowledge-based economy. That's part of the mandate that was given to council, to do whatever we need to ensure that we position the province in postsecondary education, technology transfer, technology commercialization, and compete with the best in the world. Because we have the best in the world, people that have a proven background in terms of their accomplishments, we will be getting some very good advice and will set the direction in co-operation with the Alberta Economic Development Authority, which is chaired by Bob Brawn, who is also a member of this council.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to go back to the previous question two questions ago because I thought I heard the Premier say that he would provide us with a list or a summary of the expenditures that are made across all of the departments in government on external communications and so on. I just wanted to confirm that for the record.

Mr. Chairman, I know that with the Premier you sort of overlap into lots of departments and different issues. I want to talk about the

public relations problem, if you want to call it that, around the oil sands a little bit because in question period you only get three questions, and it's a little different format. It really does seem to me that there's a mounting issue internationally with respect to the development of our oil sands and that that is compromised by the current environmental state of the developments that are taking place there. It also seems to me that it's very difficult to just deal with that as a public relations problem.

We could spend an awful lot of money trying to counteract the negative publicity, but it really seems to me that we have to tackle the issues that are underlying this international black eye, if you will. That means cleaning up the tar sands – sorry; I didn't mean to say that; old habit – oil sands, actually cleaning them up and not just doing a PR campaign. I think we have to do things differently in this province if that development and the economic benefits it brings are going to continue. We have to change how we do things, and we have to show that to the world.

I'll just leave you with that, Mr. Premier.

The Deputy Chair: The time limit is up. You can answer it if you wish.

Mr. Stelmach: Oh, sure. Very good point. I agree with the member. We can spend a lot more money on so-called branding and trying to defuse what a lot of the various organizations are bringing forward with respect to the one issue I find that is most easily identifiable, and that is the tailings ponds. We have a goal in mind that we're going to move towards dry tailings ponds, and when we do that, that will remove a lot of the issues. Once the present tailings ponds are recovered, that will, I think, take away a lot of the issues that we're facing today.

I do want to say one thing, though. There's a lot of talk, and yesterday we heard about low-carbon fuel standards, you know: Alberta, your carbon is much higher in the oil sands, and how are you going to meet the new legislation that may or may not come forward from the Americans? Well, presently today there is oil shipped from Venezuela to New Brunswick. It's refined there. We already know that carbon is a lot higher than the Alberta oil sands, and that refined fuel is making its way down into Maine and some of the other states. So are the Americans going to have two, three, four different low-carbon fuel standards? Are they going to be based on the California model that is producing 500,000 barrels a day of heavy oil that, quite frankly, is even heavier carbon?

You know, we can debate this, as you know, Mr. Chairman, with your responsibility in PNWER and the work you do with the American governors, but the best thing is to start picking away at what is the eyesore, and that is the tailings ponds. I know that we're close to having the technology to have dry tailings ponds. There's a whole bunch of new technology that's ready to move ahead. That, in itself, will remove the number one issue that I think most groups point to, and that's the tailings ponds.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to ask the Premier a couple of questions, first of all, starting with the core business of communicating with Albertans, specifically on page 127 of the ministry's business plan. The goal, Mr. Premier, as articulated in 2.3, is to "identify and implement emerging web technologies to enhance communication with Albertans."

I wonder if the Premier would share with the Assembly some of the strategies that the government proposes to increase use of things like the social media channels, the e-newsletter, the webcasts,

streaming video, video conferencing, and so on, and some of the vision on how that strategy can be enhanced given some of the challenges that we have in getting people signed on to those networks online, given some of the challenges that we also have to high-speed Internet access in some of the remote parts of the province, just generally some of the ways in which the budget expenditures with respect to communications might be achieving that objective of enhancing those web technologies.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member makes an excellent point, being that Alberta is third, I believe, behind B.C. and Ontario in terms of Internet penetration. I believe we're at about 85 per cent. One of the provinces is about 89, and the other one is 90, so we're very close to those two provinces. That is why I support what the member has said. We have to use more of the Internet and social media to get the message out.

4:40

I learnt a couple of lessons over the last number of months. One is when we were at the WorldSkills conference, and we had a panel of youth from different corners of the world. These were very, very successful former WorldSkills competitors that won the highest levels in the various competitions. When the question was asked, "How do you get your news?" whether you get it from TV, from print, all of them said that they got it from the social media. In fact, a lot of them said that they didn't get a lot of detail, just a few pertinent facts, because that's all the time they had to receive the news. Obviously, the member is pointing in a direction that we have to take.

I did my first YouTube interview, which I believe was successful, and we're going to have to do more of that. I believe the first one had something like 9,700 views. If we're going to reach out to the younger generation to get the message out in a quick response and maybe even respond quicker to, you know, some policy change or maybe some criticism that may be applied to Alberta perhaps by someone outside the province, by another government or whatever, that's the best way of getting the message out.

The government of Alberta websites are increasingly being used by Albertans. Having the opportunity to spend some time with seniors in smaller communities, who are now very well connected, I find that many seniors now use the Internet not only to connect with their relatives in other parts of Canada, other parts of Alberta, other parts of the world, but they get so much of their information now from the Internet. Sometimes we think it's the younger generation that we have to, you know, find a way of communicating with, but certainly through the social media this is one way of getting our message across.

I think that we've taken a bold step. We've got to do more, and we'll continue to do more. Are there some issues, some sensitivities? Yes, there probably are in terms of the monitoring of information that goes on the social media. But all in all, it's a positive step to take by government, and we'll continue to push in that direction.

Dr. Brown: Well, if I could follow up with a second area, Mr. Premier, with respect to enhancing the government's internal communications and better aligning the internal and external communications, which is one of the strategies under goal 2. Certainly, there is still an awful lot of paper that circulates within the government of Alberta. Any initiatives that could be taken, of course, to increase communications through our electronic media certainly would be much appreciated and I think is a much more efficient way of doing business. I wonder if the Premier could share some of his vision of where we're going with respect to those

internal communications and co-ordinating those things and trying to get us more oriented towards electronic communications in government.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, because we can reach out further to many smaller communities in the province through Internet connections, we're now able to do more and more paperless communication. The internal web-based newsletter that we have in the government of Alberta is one good example. I think it's called MyAgent, which is the human relations site. It puts on the web all of the policies and procedures for all government staff. So rather than sending tons of paper to individuals around the province, we can do it through web-based information.

The other is that, I think it was yesterday or the day before, a former colleague of this House, who's now a judge of the provincial court, Judge Adam Germain, did his first court case using the Internet. I don't know where the accused was or where the judge was, but obviously they conducted the court of law very successfully, which minimized the amount of paper and also minimized moving the accused from one location to another. So if the judges can do it – you know, they don't change very often. I hope I don't face a judge soon.

You know, you can tell that it's being included more and more in the everyday way of doing business in the province.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, if I could follow up with a third question. With respect to the open brand, Mr. Premier, Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve, I think it's an excellent initiative to sell the attributes of our province within Canada and around the world. The business plan proposes to have the brand recognized both nationally and internationally, and the Premier mentioned in his remarks an encounter with a visitor from Sweden who actually was able to recite the logo to him, Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve, so it shows that that promotion is beginning to take hold.

With respect to the issue of tourism, Mr. Premier, of course, tourism is a really important part of Alberta's future because it brings dollars. It's the same as an export, people buying our oil and gas or our lumber or our beef, because it brings dollars into the province of Alberta. Those dollars then circulate, and they have a multiplier effect on the economy. So a very, very important initiative. I wonder if the Premier could perhaps share with us how that branding will be promoted to enhance tourism in the province of Alberta and to bring those dollars here that can circulate and create jobs here in the province.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The value of just using our brand on Travel Alberta promotional products is estimated at about \$50 million. That is significant, building on the rebranding initiative.

The other business that uses the brand and is using it very successfully is Big Rock Brewery. Its brand identity is part of the Untapped Alberta campaign to promote their beer in western Canada. In fact, I could probably use one now. What they're doing is that they're reaching a much younger audience through the campaign, and they've struck really an identity in advertising on their website, on their posters, and also on their CD cover. So this is adding to the ever-growing list of brand ambassadors that are out there, including, as I said before, our universities, all of our public institutions, that also have quite a large web of distribution across Canada.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. Well, it's a privilege to have the Premier here. I appreciate the time that you take out to allow us to ask you a few questions about the Executive Council. To start off, he continues to talk, Mr. Chair, about the two-year freeze that we have on wages. One of the problems that Albertans see – again, our actions speak louder than our words. They gave a massive raise of 34 per cent, and then they said we're freezing our wages or a slight rollback. They kind of took three giant steps forward and two back. It's just frustrating for Albertans that see that and look at: well, where's it at?

Just to demonstrate, to follow up on Airdrie-Chestermere's point of questions, again, I guess, to reflect on TILMA and the labour movement that's allowed back and forth, I'm just wondering if the Premier has considered making a trade labour swap on the Executive Council because B.C.'s deputy minister makes \$289,000, seeing as how that's who we're talking about so often, and the chief of staff makes a whopping \$229,000. I'm wondering if he's aware of that inequity between these two provinces?

Mr. Stelmach: Is he asking for a raise, then? That's considerably more than the Alberta chief of staff is receiving. You know, we can debate this back and forth, but as I said before, in terms of across Canada we are in the medium for our officials in government and in management. As I said before, we had other additional benefits in terms of our personal income tax and their exemptions, which are the best in the country of Canada.

I can't remember. What was your first comment?

4:50

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I don't know if I was clear enough. I started off with: the deputy minister makes \$289,000 in B.C., not \$589,000. It's \$289,000, which is significantly less than here. And the chief of staff makes \$229,000, which I believe is significantly less than here. I just think that we need to really look at: if we want to be competitive, it's not by paying the most for our public service. There are many people that are interested and wanting to serve here in the province of Alberta. Perhaps competitiveness would be to actually say: "I have this opening, a new communications position. Who'd like to apply?" We could even be so competitive as to say: "What would you be willing to work for to have the honour of being here, in the Premier's Executive Council, to do that?" I think that we could put a whole new dynamic on competitiveness if we were to look at it in that respect.

I'm a little bit disappointed with the Premier talking about that we had these signed contracts with these public officials and saying that we couldn't break these contracts, yet he didn't have a problem breaking contracts with the oil and gas, Mr. Chair. So he says that we have to pay these out.

To switch over and to follow up a little bit more about these 180 full-time equivalent employees on page 194, we have a young lady with blond hair that follows our leader around. I was just interested if she is one of the employees on the Public Affairs Bureau or in the Executive Council. If the Premier could answer that.

Mr. Stelmach: We have to compare apples to apples in terms of salary. Knowing some of the comparisons that the member has used in the past, we'll certainly look at comparing apples to apples.

One thing – I have to address this – about the oil and gas, that we broke a contract. For the benefit of this House and for the benefit of the member, contracts were renegotiated with the oil and gas

industry at least 12 times. Those 12 times they were opened at the request of the oil and gas companies as there were different changes in the economy since the '70s. So that is a totally unfair comment, and that is simply not true. If he feels that what I'm saying is not true, he can go right back to that oil and gas community, and they'll substantiate that. That happened in the oil sands. It happened in the conventional oil and gas business as well.

Now let's talk about compensation. There was a motion passed here – and that was introduced by a member of the Official Opposition – to put together a compensation review committee. This Assembly supported it, and we are going to move forward to ensure that we find the appropriate mechanism to ensure that it's fair. The decision is something that we can bring forward to this House or at least to the MLA compensation committee.

The other thing about compensation is that we do have, of course, other benefits that are paid to members, relocation allowances. I'm not quite sure if the hon. member that's asking about this increase in compensation paid back his relocation allowance because he's back in the House.

Mr. Hinman: Well, at this point I haven't even applied for the relocation, so I don't know how I'd give back something I haven't applied for. It's the second time the Premier has brought it up. He should perhaps check on those things. But I guess I should apply. I do feel that people are entitled to their full benefits.

Comparing apples to apples, we have more crabapples here than Delicious apples, and I don't know if we can compare the two.

But he didn't answer my question. There's a young lady that follows our leader around, and I'm just wondering where in the budget she works. Is she under Public Affairs? Is she with Executive Council? If he could report on where she is and what her wages are. Is that part of the nonpartisan money that this government spends tracking and following what the Wildrose Alliance is doing?

Mr. Stelmach: All I know is that it's not the Public Affairs Bureau. I don't know who he's referring to. Maybe he has more detail. If he's seen this blond lady so many times, maybe he has a name that he can bring forward, you know, in the House.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Her name is Jessica Powless. If he could ask if she's under the Public Affairs Bureau or not.

Mr. Stelmach: No.

Mr. Hinman: Does she work out of the McDougall Centre, then?

Mr. Stelmach: During the day I'm sure she works in the McDougall Centre.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are we still on estimates?

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I guess I'd like to go back to the freedom to create, spirit to choose.

Some Hon. Members: To achieve.

Mr. Hinman: To achieve. I guess that's right. That's how well it's working. I guess I can't help but ever get it out of my mind. I was told that there's a European slogan like this: the freedom to procreate, the spirit to choose with whom. I just wondered if that's where it came from.

Going back to the Alberta advantage, where we've been to where we are now, I guess I just have a great concern with the Premier saying that, you know, we're looking at a \$50 million return on investment for this new logo to promote Alberta when, in fact, we've lost billions of dollars of investment because we've lost the Alberta advantage.

Going back to the Public Affairs Bureau and the purpose of putting out a good message, the Premier went through a list of many of the activities. He went through a detailed list. Like, we have 18 people with IT. I'm wondering if there's anyone that's following the papers and the announcements that are being made around the world, whether it's *National Geographic* or the *National Post*, about the problems with the oil sands and if there's actually a department in the Public Affairs Bureau that sends back or if the Premier even sends back rebuttals asking to get our time in there to say: these are the facts about the oil sands. We continue to be attacked, yet I don't ever see any defence. I'm just wondering if they've tried to get articles in there and rebuttals because often when it comes out in the papers, one can say: "Well, that was about me. We'd like to respond." Does the Public Affairs Bureau do that, try and get rebuttals to improve our image?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes, we do.

But before I get to that point, there was a comment made with respect to Travel Alberta and \$50 million worth of advertising. In addition to Travel Alberta, in addition to Big Rock Brewery, there are a number of additional ambassadors. There's Prairie Gardens & Greenhouses, that planted a corn maze last summer incorporating the provincial signature that was visible to air travelers. The University of Alberta has installed banners around their main campus. The University of Calgary has banners at the Olympic Oval. The Edmonton Eskimos and the Calgary Stampeders have set up in-stadium signs advertising and featuring the brand. Brewster, the bus line, will keep Alberta buses wrapped through October and have included the original provincial signature on the back of the buses with the Brewster logo.

ATCO used the provincial signature on clothing for Celebrating Excellence, a program where students submitted essays to win a trip to the Winter Olympic Games. We have Chloe Cartwright, a real estate agent with Century 21 in Cochrane, who also travels to England to work with people emigrating to Canada. There's Sirius Creation, creative arts and events management out of the United Kingdom, who now have an office in Alberta. BioAlberta, a biocommercialization association, uses the identity on promotional materials that are circulated globally. Glenn Simon Incorporated is a new ambassador that has blogged about the ambassador program and promoted the brand story video through their web links.

Working with WinSport Canada, we installed banners around Canada Olympic Park. WinSport also featured the signature in their iPhone app for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The University of Alberta Debate Society took Alberta T-shirts to an international competition in Turkey this winter to give to other teams, and the Alberta College of Art and Design has also signed on to the ambassador program.

Those are just some examples of how the branding initiative has taken hold and of our additional ambassadors that are using the logo.

5:00

Now, in terms of the Public Affairs Bureau we do monitor issues relating to departments and correct misinformation. The same is done with the oil sands. We've had a number of articles in papers not only that have been submitted by government, but some have been submitted by our ambassador in Washington whenever

something comes out that is totally incorrect. With respect to some of the speeches we gave in eastern Canada, in Toronto and in Montreal, again, I believe the day before we got to Montreal, one of the institutes there said that, you know, the oil sands threaten to pollute the Great Lakes. So we had a speech in Montreal, talked about the oil sands, how that was a very misleading statement, a misleading headline, because it had nothing to do with the oil sands.

In Toronto, again, we talked about air monitoring 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We said that air quality in Fort McMurray 98 per cent of the time is equal to or better than in any major Canadian city. For more information for the House I believe one of the radio disc jockeys said: well, the Premier comes to Toronto, tells us we've got smog.

You know, we've done a lot in getting the correct information and some of the misinformation, but you can't of course write for a lot of these particular magazines. *National Geographic* did an interview for close to an hour, and none of that interview or any of the reclamation pictures that we gave to the group to put into the magazine were used, so you can't edit, obviously, for that particular magazine or others. If they want to write a certain slant to the story, they will. That's why we have to keep undertaking every opportunity we can to correct some of the misinformation and put ever-increasing new information out there so world decision-makers have some good information to make reasonable and responsible decisions.

Mr. Hinman: We appreciate that answer, and we'd encourage the Premier and the Executive Council and Public Affairs to keep working on that positive message. We think that part of the branding and getting out a positive message is very important because we do continue to get black eyes, it seems like, and the message not getting out there.

I'd like to go back a little bit to Jessica because I'm not sure: if she works out of the McDougall Centre during the day, is she on the Executive Council payroll, then? Is that the accurate place to find her location?

Mr. Stelmach: We'll get your answer back in terms of where her employment is.

Mr. Hinman: Well, again, I guess our employees have to keep a time sheet and a record of where they're at. I'm very interested in how she travels back and forth to Edmonton. For the last two events we've had, she's been here, and I guess my question is: it's amazing how her daytime job seems to have the days off that coincide with ours.

An Hon. Member: Relevance?

Mr. Hinman: Well, it's Public Affairs, and you said that it's nonpartisan, yet we have these people that are travelling around, and I think that it's important that we're open and honest. Again, like I say, perhaps the Executive Council would like to put forward the compensation she's getting for travelling as well as the hours of the days that she's actually working. We think that it's important that the Executive Council does a nonpartisan job. I guess my question with Public Affairs and the answers we're getting here: if they're nonpartisan, if we have an important message to get out and can help them, do they work for all caucuses, then, if it's truly in there? We think that much of it is very partisan that is going forward and the message that's going out to Alberta and the rest of the world.

Again, going through the trimming back on the branding initiative to \$7 million from \$10 million, it's interesting that they're paring

back in that area, but we still have concerns whether we're getting value for our money, if that's well spent. I just really feel that it's important, as the Premier has leaned towards, that we need to lead by example, that he continues to, I think, rein in the spending in the Executive Council.

Again, we'd encourage that the most important place would be looking at the wages or the top end. The Ontario government put out what's kind of commonly known as a sunshine list. I'm wondering if the government would take steps forward with the Executive Council and for the Public Affairs to do that, if in fact he would bring that forward where for public-sector employees that earn over \$100,000, their names are on a list, and we can see where the taxpayers' money was going. Would the Executive Council consider such a move?

Mr. Stelmach: I can't speak to the Ontario sunshine list. [interjections]

An Hon. Member: No, not the sunshine girl.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, maybe that's what they're paying attention to.

Anyway, all of that is in the blue book. We don't need a sunshine list. It's on the web, all the contracts, any payments. I'm certain we're the only province in western Canada that's doing that in terms of the openness and transparency.

The other is that, you know, when we start comparing to other provinces, Alberta is the only province that at the end of this economic downturn will not be adding any to its operational debt because we have two savings accounts to work with. Every other province that's driving a deficit is going to have to add to the debt, which their deficits will because, in fact, other than the province of Saskatchewan with a very small savings account, the rest are all adding to their debt. Ontario will be at least \$180 billion, maybe even closer to \$200 billion in debt. I hope they're not comparing to that particular province.

Anyway, the 2010 budget interview by area. Office of the Premier/Executive Council: the budget is \$9.9 million. That's a reduction of \$561,000. Office of the Lieutenant Governor: \$493,000. That's a reduction of \$18,000. Corporate services: \$1.6 million, a reduction of \$191,000. Corporate communications: \$10.5 million. That's a reduction of \$354,000. Communications support services: \$2.2 million. That is the only increase because there are additional staff there, \$128,000. And the branding initiative: a drop of \$2.7 million. That's a budget reduction of \$3.7 million, which is about 10.1 per cent.

Mr. Hinman: Well, we'd very much like the commitment from the government, I guess, on the employment of Jessica and her job and her travelling. We find that that's not in the best interests of taxpayers' money. We'd encourage the government again, though, to go after the news and the media that are publishing untruths about the oil sands as the Premier knows that there's a great story up there.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to probably deviate a little bit from what's been happening. I'm going to actually focus on something that's in the estimates.

An Hon. Member: Relevant? Important?

Mr. Rogers: Well, that's what I'm hoping for, Mr. Chairman.
Mr. Chairman, on page 127 of Budget 2010 the Executive Council

business plan outlines the continued implementation of the corporate communications policy for the government. We've heard bits and pieces based on some of the questions or partial questions that have been asked by some of the members across the way, so I'm wondering if the Premier might just give us a bit of a clearer indication of what the intent of this policy is all about.

Mr. Stelmach: The intent of the policy with respect to the corporate communications policy is laudable. We want to ensure that we have open communications across the provincial government and make sure that these are well co-ordinated and effective. They also have to be fiscally responsible but also responsive to the needs of Albertans. This includes not only communicating to Albertans but also actively listening to Albertans and making sure that not only is our message getting across to Albertans but also hearing from Albertans that we're getting the right message from them as well in a number of jurisdictions.

5:10

Now, many jurisdictions, including the federal government, use communications policies to help ensure the public receives timely, clear, and accurate information about the priorities, policies, programs, any changes that may be coming forward, and, of course, the services we offer on their behalf. A few detailed examples of this policy illustrate this. For instance, we try to consistently and clearly identify communications materials from the government of Alberta. That means everything from ads in papers to postings on the Internet, signs on government buildings. Of course, now we have the benefit of our new Alberta brand to help us in that identification. As outlined in the policy, we also aim to communicate with Albertans through a variety of ways, providing information in the formats that are most appropriate and accommodate different needs. We provide documents in large print for seniors or for those that are visually impaired. Again, that's also a part of the policy.

In terms of accommodating needs, we also take care to ensure we are sensitive to concerns of the public and respect privacy and individual rights. We always try to be as prompt, courteous, and responsive as possible.

There was a comment made about a particular staff member. McDougall Centre houses many public functions as a government building: AEDA, Alberta Economic Development Authority; the Calgary Homeless Foundation; and the Premier's office; and it's used for government meetings like caucus. Once again, the person the member refers to does not work for the Public Affairs Bureau.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for that clarification, Mr. Premier. Certainly, I think you have some laudable goals. I'm just wondering, in terms of taking this across all the ministries, how you'll be achieving this. Is this something that the PAB will be responsible for, and how do you expect to achieve that across ministries?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Public Affairs Bureau is the lead in administering this policy to make sure that across ministries we have the same message, concise, and it's ensuring that we're relying on every communications tool to make sure that that happens. Now, as the various branches do their jobs, the Public Affairs Bureau provides guidance. It provides support in a variety of areas.

In terms of cross-ministry initiatives we are moving more and more to cross-ministry initiatives with respect to a lot of the social benefits, whether it be seniors, lower income Albertans, et cetera. How do you collapse all that information that's going forward into a concise package that is presentable, understandable to Albertans that do rely on that information? That's the main priority, the main job of the Public Affairs Bureau, that they manage the delivery of that information and the message.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to raise a few issues. I am on page 125 of the business plans. I have a handful of issues, so I'll go back and forth with the Premier if that's okay.

Strategic priority 1 on page 125 speaks to strengthening agency governance, and it says, "Support the implementation of the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act," and it goes on from there. Mr. Premier, you may well know that there are concerns in the largest Alberta government agency, Alberta Health Services, that there are potential conflicts of interest. That arises in situations where there are physicians occupying positions in a public organization who are assigning contracts or allocating business to clinics in which they are investors. I'm thinking, for example, in Calgary. This has historically occurred – and I expect it's still occurring – around orthopaedic surgeries, for hip and knee replacement. I'm certain that it's still occurring in the cataract surgery industry in Calgary.

It's blatant violation of good governance. It would be not unlike, say, an assistant deputy minister of Transportation being able to channel road-building contracts to a company that he or his family are shareholders in. So I'm wondering if the Premier is prepared in this coming year, given his strategic priority 1, to take a hard stand on conflicts of interest in health care delivery and bring performance there up to the standard that would be accepted generally as a best practice for public governance.

Mr. Stelmach: Sure. Provide the names of the individuals that are in question, and we'll make sure that there is no conflict of interest.

Dr. Taft: I'll start with Dr. Stephen Miller – you can take notes on this – who is a very senior orthopaedic surgeon in Calgary and an investor in Network Health, HRG. For many years he was, in fact, chief of orthopaedics in the Calgary health region and, I suspect, may well still serve in an influential role in orthopaedic surgery allocations in Alberta Health Services.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you're on the estimates?

Dr. Taft: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'd suggest that you consult your *Beauchesne's* on what's allowed and what's not allowed in terms of relevance. I've cited the page, I've cited the paragraph, and then I quoted from the sentence that I'm referring to.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

Dr. Taft: Thank you.

Another name would be the Huang out of Calgary. Their company is called Enterprise Universal. One of the Huang brothers was chief of ophthalmology for the Calgary health region for many years and was actively involved in – well, in fact, we have copies of correspondence – assigning surgeries to clinics that he owns. It's a

real concern to other people doing ophthalmological surgery, cataract surgery, in Calgary because they, frankly, feel like perhaps the Huangs have an inside track.

Those are two names, and I'd urge you to look into that.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Dr. Taft: Again, I would tell the minister who's heckling that I'm referring specifically to page 125 of the business plan, strategic priority 1. The sentence from which I'm working says: "Support the implementation of the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act." Okay? I hope the minister takes some lessons in *Beauchesne*.

Now I'll turn to page 126. Again, it's Executive Council business plan 2010. I'll quote from goal 1 of Executive Council: "Government policy and planning are coordinated and effective." It says under What It Means: "Decision makers need comprehensive and coordinated policy and planning advice and analysis to make strategic decisions."

Perhaps the most fundamental strategic decision that his government has to make is around securing its long-term fiscal security. I know this is an interest for the Premier. I suspect it's a priority. I'm thinking back to correspondence that was submitted to the government from Jack Mintz after his fiscal review indicating that the government needed to have some \$200 billion in reserve if it was to be able to sustain its spending in the long term.

I'm wondering if the Premier, as the leader of the government of Alberta and as the person who is in charge in Executive Council of "comprehensive and coordinated policy and planning," sees a way forward to securing or meeting the challenges of the Mintz report and ultimately obtaining a \$200 billion plus balance in the heritage fund or an equivalent. What's being done now to address those long-term strategic needs?

5:20

Mr. Stelmach: With respect to the two names that were mentioned, I heard the words: was a member. I'd like to know from you: is. Put that in writing, send it to my office, and I'll check it out. But make sure that it is a member. No, no. You've done that in the past, so just put it in writing and send it to me, and we'll get it to you in writing because, you know, using members' names and was a member, not is but was. However, in terms of the implementation of the Public Agencies Governance Act this is an area that we have undertaken through legislation and will be following up on under regulations.

About 50 per cent of the money, maybe even more of the money, that taxpayers give us goes through various boards and agencies to support the various programs through various authorities. The purpose, of course, is to ensure that we have the right people for the right job by requiring competence-based recruitment and appointments; encouraging agencies to improve their effectiveness by providing orientation, evaluation, and training to their members; requiring agencies to have a written statement of their mandate, roles and responsibilities, and code of conduct; clarifying the relationships and accountabilities between government and agencies; requiring periodic reviews of all agencies to ensure they are operating as effectively as possible and ensuring the public knows what steps are being taken to promote agency effectiveness.

This is, I believe, one of the few pieces of legislation that have been passed within the country of Canada. The Agency Governance Secretariat has been working with departments and agencies to develop regulations to accompany the act. The process of consultation has been extensive, and we have close to final versions of the regulations that we can implement.

You know, I can go from so many of the elements, from agency creation and review, agency inventory, mandate and roles documents, competency-based appointments, orientation to public-sector governance, governance fixed term length and maximum years of service for directors, codes of conduct, evaluation processes, agency member remuneration, and responding to the Auditor General recommendations, which was brought up here earlier, in terms of the compensation practices and some of the compensation of senior executives that agreements were entered into with.

The comment made I think it was with respect to the Mintz report. I am actually buoyed by the fact that the member across is serious now about putting some money aside because I remember in the last campaign part of their policy was to spend the money that we had in the sustainability fund on infrastructure within a matter of years. Glad that they've reversed their original policy decision from the last election, and they're going to be working with the government to build a long-term savings policy for future generations.

I guess that's it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Actually, we had a very extensive policy developed in which we took the initiative in the last election and in probably 18 months leading up to the election put in place a formula to save a substantial portion of nonrenewable resource revenues to get us towards a much larger heritage fund, which in the long term could sustain government spending. Is there any work going on in the government's strategic business plan or its other policy initiatives to look at that sort of option? Is there work being done on the feasibility of setting aside a portion of nonrenewable resource revenues into a permanent savings account that would be like an endowment fund for the government of Alberta?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Yes. It's a responsibility of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. He'll be working through the policy discussion both within government but also seeking an opinion from Albertans in terms of how the fund should be built and how it should be retained for future generations.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: I'll leave it at that. Thanks. Give somebody else a try.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just don't want to disappoint the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, so page 189 of the estimates. We're going to be going over the Public Affairs budget and the Executive Council budget and the branding initiative, specifically those first two items.

Again, to the salaries. I just have to get my head around this, and excuse me for not being able to do it sooner, but we want to compare apples to apples, and I agree with that. If you go to the other provinces, what they're paying their Deputy Minister for the Executive Council and their chief of staff, for the deputy minister Alberta's is \$531,000. B.C. is \$289,000; Ontario, \$239,000. If you look at the chief of staff, Alberta is at \$390,000; B.C., \$229,000.

Again, I think those are apples to apples, and just in this time, with the deficit being the size that it is, with having to lead by example, how can we excuse that difference? B.C. is a bigger province than us. It's bigger. It's about a million people bigger. How are we

paying our chief of staff and deputy minister that much more money?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, I'm going to go through it one more time. I agree that B.C. is a bigger province and, in fact, will be at about . . . [interjection] Well, he says better run. I guess with this latest budget their accumulated debt will be close to \$30 billion. So I guess, you know, if we wouldn't have had prudent planning, we would not have a sustainability fund to carry us through some very, very difficult economic times. You know, it's a matter of opinion as to who is better run. If he thinks that B.C. is a better run province with that accumulated debt, so be it. I mean, I'm not going to argue with the individual.

The salaries and benefits disclosure. Again, I read into the record earlier in terms of the amount that the member is referring to. There were two individuals in that position. One was leaving, and a new deputy started, so there were some vacation payouts, et cetera.

The base salary for a senior here is \$320,000; for the chief of staff it's \$253,000. What they've done is they've taken a 10 per cent reduction in their salary plus the elimination of the bonus, so with that, as I read into the record earlier, it's almost, I think, 200 and some-odd thousand dollars. I don't have all of the information in front of me, but that is a substantial reduction, plus the fact that over government \$1.4 million savings resulted from managerial people getting together and saying, "Look, we'll forgo part of our compensation," which was the bonus, and that was about \$1.4 million. That is just for the Executive Council. That is a significant reduction for Executive Council, \$1.4 million.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. It's on the record now.

Returning to the Public Affairs Bureau and the Executive Council office and their budgets, this is important because you said earlier on that the Public Affairs Bureau, nonpartisan, completely nonpartisan. You've established that Ms Powless does not work in the Public Affairs Bureau. Great. She does work out of the McDougall Centre during the day, you've said, so the question is: who pays for her salary? Is it the Executive Council, or is it the Public Affairs Bureau? If it's not Public Affairs, I'm assuming it's Executive Council during the day, her day job, as you referred to it. If so, if that is her day job, why was she up here this morning during the day covering our press conference in the press room downstairs? Did she have a day off today, and if so, why was she given a day off? I don't think today is a holiday.

5:30

Mr. Stelmach: Information is that she's not a member of the Executive Council.

But speaking about Executive Council, when I mentioned that \$1.4 million Executive Council bonus that has been eliminated, the total across government in compensation for management and, again, voluntarily given up in bonuses across government was a saving of \$40 million. That is a substantial saving in the budget.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. That's good information.

Again, she's an employee of the Executive Council. Will the Premier undertake to find out why she was here today covering an event in the legislative media room downstairs when she works out of the McDougall Centre? That's a partisan activity.

Mr. Stelmach: You know, I'm not even aware that a lady with that name was here in the building. I will get some further detail. I don't know what the issue there is. Anyway, we'll get the information.

Mr. Anderson: That's fair. I appreciate that.

Now, just to end off, I'd like to talk a little bit about the chief of staff and his role. I do have a good understanding, I feel, of what the deputy minister does in the Executive Council. I'm a little bit hazier on the chief of staff. What, Mr. Premier, do you feel is the chief of staff's role? You're smiling from ear to ear. It must be an important role. Could you tell me what that role is?

Mr. Stelmach: The chief of staff, of course, takes most of the arrows in terms of issues management with respect to, you know, cabinet and caucus, does similar work compared to executive assistants to ministers. He has a huge responsibility in ensuring that the cabinet is apprised of various issues and situations. It takes a lot of time. It's not an easy job. There are issues that arise, human resource issues to issues that may come forward at any particular time, any time of the day or night. It is not an easy role to fulfill, but he's doing an excellent job.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. So he's paid \$390,000, obviously, it sounds like, to oversee the staff that you have in government. That amount over and above what we pay you as Premier, what the government of Alberta pays you as Premier, is that hazard pay for taking those extra slings and arrows, perhaps? What's the reason for that extra amount?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not quite sure what extra amount he's talking about. My salary?

Mr. Anderson: No, no. Sorry. The amount that he makes more than you, Mr. Premier: why is that? Is that because of all the slings and arrows he has to take?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, I think the earlier questioning was that the Premier should be the highest paid official in government. That would be relative to a mayor paid higher than the CEO or the CAO of the municipality, you know, or a university professor paid less than the Premier, all of those things. We're attracting good, qualified people to various management positions, and we are in the median in terms of staffing in those particular areas. If that is the new policy for an individual for that party, then so be it. I guess we're either going to see a huge reduction one way or a huge increase for the position, whether it be a mayor or Premier, which I don't accept.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. I think Albertans would feel a lot better. You know, I don't think anyone has a problem with what the Premier makes. I think he's one of the hardest working if not the hardest working person in this House, absolutely. There's no doubt about that. What I think Albertans have a problem with is that his chief of staff and his deputy minister and the people that are supposed to report to him are making that much more when they're supposed to be in the public service. But we'll move on.

The role of the chief of staff again. Is there any policy development role that the chief of staff plays? Is his job to communicate important things to cabinet and caucus, or does he also get himself involved in the development of policy, and to what extent would that involvement be?

Mr. Stelmach: Policy is developed by elected officials. The process is that members, government members have ideas, different policy objectives, maybe something reflecting the wishes of their particular constituency that they bring forward to caucus. Caucus then can take it forward to a cabinet policy discussion, where the minister

then will build a ministerial recommendation. That recommendation comes back to CPC. CPC then has a look at it, whether they support the ministerial recommendation. They may change some of it, may add to it, maybe delete some part of it. Once that cabinet policy committee makes a decision on it, then it goes to cabinet for final approval.

Then the co-ordination in terms of if it's policy, that has to be then announced provincially. That is co-ordinated through the Public Affairs Bureau to make sure that the information is disseminated to all Albertans. The policy may be with respect to an issue, perhaps, in Transportation or in any department, new legislation that's passed and the regulations that follow and how we communicate those with those authorities that will have to implement those regulations, or maybe changes in the Municipal Government Act that various municipalities will then have to abide by. So there's a lot of time spent in communicating all those policy decisions over to the PAB and getting the correct information out.

Mr. Anderson: We're paying the chief of staff this amount of money, so I'm just wondering. Again I go back to policy. I want to understand his role in the development of policy. I guess the problem I have or the concern I have, the thing that's unclear is, for example, in the *Calgary Herald* the other day the chief of staff was quoted as saying that he wants to make sure that the government consults more with Albertans as we go forward on various different topics. What the topics are, that's policy, so we won't go there, but he wants to consult more. I'm wondering: when he said that, I'm assuming the Premier would say in that case that the chief of staff was talking that the Premier would consult more with Albertans going forward on these difficult policy decisions. Or is he talking about the chief of staff consulting more with Albertans as we go forward on these difficult policy decisions?

Mr. Stelmach: We're going to have quite an extensive policy discussion this spring and into summer, and that is with respect to following up on the recommendations that have been brought forward by the health committee, that is chaired very ably, that brought forward a number of recommendations. Those recommendations then go to a policy field committee. We will hear representations from Albertans in terms of: how do we build an act that reflects health provision services in this province for seniors, acute care, emergency? Is the health care relevant, or can we add to it, add a few more principles? All of those things are just an example of the consultation that will take place.

I feel that we're the closest now, in all the years that I've had the pleasure of representing the constituency, to getting full input from Albertans. Initial input was from, of course, the health care providers, the advocates that brought forward recommendations. Now those recommendations are going forward to a full policy discussion, again, something that this government introduced. We never had policy field committees before. It has been, I believe, an improvement and an opportunity for Albertans to bring forward their views on various issues that go before the policy field committee.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Chair, time? How much time left?

The Deputy Chair: You've got over five minutes left.

Mr. Anderson: Five minutes. Okay.

I guess that moving along on this with regard to the executive, I want to understand, too, the Executive Council and the budget that we spend on it and its role with regard to policy-making and how caucus relates to that Executive Council decision. For example, to

put it into context, you have a caucus meeting on, say, the budget, and you approve certain parameters in the budget. After a caucus makes approvals and it goes to Executive Council, are the recommendations of caucus often superceded by Executive Council as that process goes forward? I mean, the budget document I remember before I left the government is very different from the one that was announced in the House, yet there was no caucus meeting in between. I'm wondering: does Executive Council have the ability or the power to change that, and does the chief of staff have any role at all in making those changes? They don't seem to be going through the elected representatives unless you're the one making those changes or approving them.

5:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, with respect to the budget I think we've got to go back to British parliamentary practice. This caucus had an open discussion in terms of the goals and objectives of government and funding their priorities. Definitely, out of that discussion health was a priority; postsecondary education was a priority. I heard good discussion about infrastructure as well. We heard a considerable amount of good, positive information from caucus members, but the final budget document is in the total purview, control of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. The reason I say that is that there may be some budget implications with respect to tax changes, maybe tax increases, maybe tax decreases, maybe new forms of taxation, you know, maybe a tax put on gasoline, for instance, all of those things.

Well, as I said before in this House when the question was raised, I believe, in question period, I would have had to fire the Minister of Finance and Enterprise if he had discussed these changes with a small group of elected government members and given the information well in advance of these changes in the budget. That, I submit to you, Mr. Chairman, is not part of British parliamentary practice.

The information in terms of goals, objectives, where is the priority spending given a limited revenue stream: those generally remain with caucus, but the final determination is always made by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise in delivering the budget in this House.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. That makes sense. I guess the question would be: bringing it back to what we were discussing, does Executive Council have an effect on what the minister of finance would put out in their final budget?

Mr. Stelmach: The cabinet, because it's Executive Council, certainly works with the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, but in terms of delivery the final detail in that budget speech is up to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Cabinet does have the authority to discuss it openly and give suggestions to the minister of finance, but all of those things are maintained in strict confidence around the cabinet table because, once again, in British parliamentary practice Executive Council is the government.

In this particular case in this government and in this caucus we had very extensive discussions in terms of the goals and priorities, on where we want to see increased spending, where we want to see reductions and in what departments, and that was made around the general caucus table. The very specifics, though, still are within Executive Council and within the purview of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Mr. Anderson: I guess I'll just say it this way. In the Executive Council did the current minister of finance bring forward these changes, or were they determined before he came into his current position by Executive Council?

Mr. Stelmach: All discussions of Executive Council are confidential.

Mr. Anderson: That's what I thought. That's it.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I would like to go back. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview started by questioning the government priorities on page 126, that again government policy and planning are co-ordinated and effective. I guess the Premier answered a little bit earlier that we are going to come out of this the best of any province. I don't think there's an Albertan that isn't grateful for the sustainability fund, but the key of the sustainability fund and what the Wildrose Alliance and the Liberals were saying is that what we need to do is have a big enough sustainability fund that it is sustainable. The spending is out of control, and the Premier says: well, we're going to come out of this the best of any province. Does he actually have a date when this is going to turn around and our revenue is going to balance the budget?

Currently we're not the best run, in my humble opinion, when we have a \$4.7 billion deficit that's acknowledged and a true deficit of \$7.5 billion. We have, well, a liability to the teachers' pension fund of currently \$7 billion. The next Premier of this province is going to inherit a debt that is going to be enormous. Are we going to be able to pay it off? I guess that with the Premier talking about the importance of renegotiating because of boom times in the oil and gas industry, because the salaries really boomed as well in the Executive Council in that same period, has the Premier considered renegotiating the salary of his Executive Council?

Mr. Stelmach: There was so much there from all over the place. For the matter of the record, we are the only jurisdiction in Canada that has a large sustainability fund, \$17 billion. We are also the only jurisdiction in Canada that has another, additional savings fund, which is the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, which, I might add, is rebounding very, very quickly, much faster than originally anticipated given the losses and the economic downturn. You know, all of us have lost significant dollars in our RRSPs and our investments during that difficult period. We're going to see the heritage savings trust fund come back, and there are policies that could be changed with respect to the heritage savings trust fund. Do we leave all the money in? Do we just inflation-proof it? All of these things will be discussed by Albertans.

I will say, though, that there was some mention that, well, we should have listened to someone that said, "You put all this money in Alberta heritage savings trust fund to build the fund, and your operational fund should only be 10 per cent of your operating," which would have been a little less than \$4 billion. Well, there is no one in this House or anywhere that's going to come forward and say: "You know what? You should have anticipated the most severe economic downturn since the '30s." Nobody did that.

The reason we put that much money in the sustainability fund, the \$17 billion, is that we already knew the volatility of our oil and gas. You can't go from \$75 to \$147 and then down to \$30. In fact, I remember being questioned in this House by the opposition, who said: well, you know, you capped oil royalties at \$120, and it's now \$147, and you're losing money. Everybody got excited. Well, within months it was down to \$30, and in fact at the end of the year we hit what we thought would be an anticipated average for oil, around \$72, for that particular year. That's good budgeting.

The other thing is that we are debt free. We learned a lesson. We

paid those debts off in the '90s, and I'm one of the members in this House who went through the pain of getting there. It wasn't easy, and we're not going down that road again.

The other thing is that we have the most competitive taxes in the country of Canada. While we suffered through this economic downturn, there was unemployment. There's no doubt about it. It was across areas from forestry to agriculture, oil and gas, tourism, you know, with fewer people travelling. Our small business suffered through all of this. During that period of time this province still contributed \$21.1 billion to Ottawa, and collectively over the last 10 years it's \$131 billion. We're still at \$200 per capita, about \$700 million, short on our Canada health transfer even after contributing all of those. I've mandated the Minister of Finance and Enterprise to start working with the federal government on how we can correct this fiscal imbalance.

All this talk about saving \$200 billion. I've asked the presenter of that particular policy: how are you going to defend it if you have such a large savings account when you know you have people down east that just want to get their fingers on it at some time because they're going to have accumulated debts in the billions? I mean, Ontario's will probably be \$200 billion, Quebec's probably \$200 billion or more. That doesn't include their Crown corporation debt, Mr. Chair, not one dollar of Crown corporation debt.

5:50

What is going to happen to the country of Canada if we don't get on the road to recovery and balanced budgets? We're going to do this in this province in spite of the fact that we took such a huge hit economically. We're going to be balanced and we're going to be back in the black by 2012-13. We're going to be the first jurisdiction to do it in Canada. We're going to have money in our sustainability account. While others are going to be adding to their debt, we're going to have money in the bank. We're going to be able to attract even more investment because we're going to be the most innovative and competitive economy in all of Canada and, indeed, North America. I promise that to every Albertan.

Mr. Hinman: Will the Premier promise not to run in the next election, then, if he's not back in the black? I'm almost amused at some of the statements that he's making there that we're not running a deficit.

There were a lot of nobodies – and I was one of those nobodies – who said that we shouldn't spend more than 25 per cent of our resource revenue on our year-to-year budgeting. We were way over

that. There are many economists that directed that to him. I will agree: this government doesn't have the courage to stand up and defend a \$200 billion heritage trust fund. But the purpose of that is so that if you look at the average return on investment of 6 per cent, it would be roughly \$12 billion, which would replace the revenue that would be lost when our resource revenue is depleted. There are many nobodies, Mr. Chair, who have given instructions, but just like the instructions on not changing the royalty framework – and I was one of those nobodies who said that – this Premier didn't listen to it.

My question on all of that. He talks about the heritage trust fund; he talks about the sustainability fund. The sustainability fund is there when you can sustain your spending. This government is not able to sustain that spending. It's off the chart, whether it's infrastructure and other things. It was burning a hole in their pocket, but thankfully there wasn't enough capacity in the industry to even spend all that money, so they had to save it. But what did he . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now immediately rise and report progress on the estimates of Executive Council. I would invite the staff to leave now.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration resolutions for Executive Council relating to the 2010-2011 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: All those members in concurrence with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Visitors	355
Introduction of Guests	355, 367
Members' Statements	
Fallen Four Fifth Anniversary	356
Ports-to-Plains Alliance	356
School Closures	357
Calgary South Health Campus	357
Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie 2010	365
Jennie Flett	366
Oral Question Period	
Hospital Construction in Grande Prairie	357
Health Facilities Capital Plans	358
Waterfowl Deaths in Oil Sands Tailings Pond	358
Oil Royalty Framework	358, 365
New School Construction in Beaumont	359
Sour Gas Well Blowout Insurance	360
Immigrant Investor Program	360
Support for the Film Industry	360
Sport, Recreation, and Physical Activity Funding	361
Grizzly Bear Management	361
Oil Sands Tailings Ponds	362
New School Construction in St. Albert	362
Protection of Children in Care	363
Winagami Lake Fish Management	363
Online Government Services	364
Foreign-trained Physicians	364
Syphilis Prevention and Control	365
Introduction of Bills	
Bill Pr. 1 Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act	366
Bill Pr. 2 Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2010	366
Bill Pr. 3 Lamont Health Care Centre Act	366
Tabling Returns and Reports	366
Committee of Supply	
Main Estimates 2010-11	
Executive Council	367

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

**Select Special Auditor
General Search Committee**

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Blakeman
Campbell
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Quest
Rogers

**Standing Committee on the
Alberta Heritage Savings
Trust Fund**

Chair: Ms Tarchuk
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
DeLong
Forsyth
Groeneveld
Johnston
MacDonald
Quest

**Standing Committee on
Community Services**

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr
Anderson
Benito
Bhullar
Chase
Johnson
Johnston
Notley
Rodney
Sarich
Vacant

**Standing Committee on the
Economy**

Chair: Mr. Bhardwaj
Deputy Chair: Mr. Taylor
Allred
Amery
Boutilier
Fawcett
Hinman
Lund
Marz
Taft
Weadick
Woo-Paw

**Standing Committee on
Health**

Chair: Mr. McFarland
Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor
Forsyth
Groeneveld
Horne
Lindsay
Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
Taft
Vandermeer

**Standing Committee on
Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Hinman
Lindsay
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Quest
Rogers

**Special Standing Committee
on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Kowalski
Deputy Chair: Mr. Campbell
Anderson
Elniski
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Oberle
Rogers
Taylor
VanderBurg
Weadick

**Standing Committee on
Private Bills**

Chair: Dr. Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw
Allred Jacobs
Amery Kang
Benito Lindsay
Bhardwaj McQueen
Boutilier Olson
Calahasen Sandhu
Dallas Sarich
Doerksen Taft
Drysdale Xiao
Hinman

**Standing Committee on
Privileges and Elections,
Standing Orders and
Printing**

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock
Amery Lindsay
Berger McFarland
Calahasen Mitzel
DeLong Notley
Doerksen Pastoor
Forsyth Quest
Groeneveld Sherman
Hinman Tarchuk
Jacobs Taylor
Leskiw

**Standing Committee on
Public Accounts**

Chair: Mr. MacDonald
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rodney
Anderson Groeneveld
Benito Kang
Calahasen Mason
Chase Olson
Dallas Sandhu
Elniski Vandermeer
Fawcett Xiao
Griffiths

**Standing Committee on
Public Safety and Services**

Chair: Mr. Drysdale
Deputy Chair: Mr. Kang
Boutilier
Brown
Calahasen
Cao
Forsyth
Griffiths
MacDonald
Rogers
Sandhu
Xiao

**Standing Committee on
Resources and Environment**

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Ms Blakeman
Anderson
Berger
Boutilier
Dallas
Hehr
Jacobs
Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

If your address is incorrect, please clip on the dotted line, make any changes, and return to the address listed below. To facilitate the update, please attach the last mailing label along with your account number.

Subscriptions
Legislative Assembly Office
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 - 107 Street
EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4

Last mailing label:

Account # _____

New information:

Name _____

Address _____

Subscription information:

Annual subscriptions to the paper copy of *Alberta Hansard* (including annual index) are \$127.50 including GST if mailed once a week or \$94.92 including GST if picked up at the subscription address below or if mailed through the provincial government interdepartmental mail system. Bound volumes are \$121.70 including GST if mailed. Cheques should be made payable to the Minister of Finance.

Price per issue is \$0.75 including GST.

On-line access to *Alberta Hansard* is available through the Internet at www.assembly.ab.ca

Address subscription inquiries to Subscriptions, Legislative Assembly Office, 1001 Legislature Annex, 9718 - 107 St., EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4, telephone 780.427.1302.

Address other inquiries to Managing Editor, *Alberta Hansard*, 1001 Legislature Annex, 9718 - 107 St., EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4, telephone 780.427.1875.