



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Fourth Session

# Alberta Hansard

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Issue 5a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 27th Legislature

Fourth Session

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 1, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen. Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 23 grade 6 students from H.A. Kostash school in Smoky Lake. They've come all the way down here from that little town about an hour and a half away to be a part of the School at the Leg. program. They're accompanied by their teacher, Chelsea Evans, and four parents: Mrs. Chizawsky, Miss Lewchuk, Mr. Tallio, and Mrs. Charlton. I met with these students this morning. They're certainly a bright, energetic group and full of great questions. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of the Legislature a group of 62 bright visitors from St. Albert, from J.J. Nearing elementary school. They are accompanied by Mrs. Christine Sowinski, Ms Barb Schoneville, Mr. Rob Kelly, Mr. Curt McDougall, and parent helpers Mrs. Irene Buck, Mrs. Lisa Burr, Mr. Todd Laycock. I had the opportunity to talk to each of them on the stairs of the rotunda and ask them questions about what we do here in this Legislature. I can tell you that they are very knowledgeable, very bright young students, and they are the future of our province. They are in both galleries, and I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group from the Yellowhead Tribal College. I don't see them in the members' gallery, so I'm presuming they're up here in the public. There they are. Right on. I'd like to introduce instructor Linda Anderson and a group of students who are here today. As a side note, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake and I were just downstairs with them a moment ago taking a photograph in the rotunda. We look forward to seeing you soon. Thank you for rising. Please let's give them the traditional greeting of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Liepert:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of 25 participants in the oil sands internship program. The oil sands internship program is a 24-month collaboration between Alberta Energy and Environment, and it provides a unique opportunity for young professionals to help contribute to the environmentally sustainable development of Alberta's oil sands resources. The program provides interns with the opportunity to rotate for 12 months each in both the Alberta Department of Energy and the Department of Environment, working alongside seasoned professionals. These young professionals are seated in our members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege today to rise in this Assembly and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a long-time friend of mine, Calgarian Bill McGregor. Bill has extensive experience working with K to 12 education systems, and he's the chairman of the board of directors for the Foundations for the Future Charter Academy, several locations, of course, being in my constituency of Calgary-Egmont. Bill is a strong proponent of school choice in Alberta. I would ask that every member please join in and give him the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour to introduce three extraordinary Albertans. Chris Mahoney has been with Enviros Wilderness School Association for eleven years and is going on her third year as CEO. Kevin Blanchette is the chairman of the Enviros board and managing partner of Evolve Capital in Calgary. Marty Hoornaert is an Enviros board member, the VP of policy for Calgary-Lougheed, and a fine lawyer at Hoffman Dorchik in Calgary. I will be doing a member's statement on Enviros today. In the meantime members might enjoy reading through the pamphlets on their desks that have been provided by Enviros along with a pen. I would ask people who work miracles every day for Albertans – Chris, Kevin, and Marty – to rise. They're in the public gallery. Please accept the warm wishes of everyone in the Alberta Legislative Assembly.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the acting leader of the Alberta Party, Sue Huff. Sue graduated from the University of Alberta with a BA in drama and has worked for the past two decades in the arts. Sue has worked as an actor, writer, researcher, and director in theatre, film, radio, and television. More recently Sue served as a trustee at the Edmonton public school board. While on the board she was a strong advocate for transparency, accountability, and protecting vulnerable populations. Sue will be the acting leader of the Alberta Party until the end of May, when the party has concluded its leadership race. I look forward to continuing to work with her closely in my new political home. I would ask Sue to rise now – she's in the visitor's gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

### Irrigation Projects Water Sharing Agreement

**Mr. Jacobs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today to recognize an admirable initiative taken on by the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association, which represents all of Alberta's irrigation districts. This association recently passed a declaration stating that in times of water shortages due to drought the districts assure that within their right to control, they will share water for human use and livestock sustenance.

In 2001, a year of severe drought, the district shared water from their licensed allocations with surrounding communities, industry, and other agricultural operations. The districts realized that in times of such water shortages, human needs come before the need to irrigate crops. The sharing arrangements with the many water users were made possible with the help of Alberta Environment and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. All participating licensees shared the burden of reduced water supplies and the benefits of the sharing agreement. All could access only 60 per cent of their licensed allocation.

This spirit of community co-operation among nearly all licensees was recognized with an award from the Irrigation Association, an international organization based in the United States. It is in this spirit of community co-operation that the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association, representing all irrigation districts of Alberta, passed their declaration.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the irrigation districts for formalizing their willingness to share their water licence allocation with communities and others to make water available for human use and for livestock in times of drought.

Thank you.

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

### Physician and Family Support Program Funding

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time this afternoon I will table correspondence I have received from five doctors who live in my constituency expressing deep concern over a proposal to cut funding for the physician and family support program.

Now, I understand that this is a bargaining tool that government and Alberta Health Services are using in their negotiations with the Alberta Medical Association towards a new master agreement. I understand the AMA is not only urging its members to undertake just this kind of letter-writing campaign but is even providing a link to the government website to help its members identify their MLA, and I know that this will probably work out in the end, as collective bargaining sessions usually do, after both sides are finished marking their territory, if you will, and actually get down to the business of reaching a new deal.

1:40

What I don't understand, Mr. Speaker, is why the government would choose to threaten to cut funding to this particular program. It cost \$2.6 million last year. For that it assisted over 1,000 doctors and their families who sought the program's help for their own health-related issues, including addictions and mental health. By comparison if we had, oh, just left those docs to twist in the wind and burn out and quit, \$2.6 million would have replaced maybe a dozen of them. Back in 2006 the estimated cost of replacing one physician was between \$150,000 and \$300,000.

Mr. Speaker, this province has a doctor shortage. One in four Calgarians doesn't have a family doc. I would think we'd want to hang onto the doctors we have and not drive more of them away. Every letter I will table today speaks to the stress that comes from

being a doctor if for no other reason than that you tend to lose some of your patients every year to death and to the role the PFSP has played in keeping those doctors sane and healthy.

Mr. Speaker, I think I speak for most of my constituents and most Albertans when I say that when we need a doctor, we want to know that at that moment the doctor is in better shape than we are.

Thank you.

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

### Enviros Wilderness School

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to acknowledge Enviros Wilderness School Association, which has been strengthening families and their communities in Calgary and area one child at a time for 34 years. In these trying times families experience all types of pressure. Many parents struggle to make ends meet, and children are sometimes left to their own devices. All too often the results are extremely undesirable.

The programs at Enviros offer support and hope to these children and their families as they deal with issues such as neglect, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, substance abuse, and a myriad of other problems. Through experiential learning at Enviros children and youth build resilience while learning new life skills. The result is stronger young people who make better choices from that point forward. Enviros delivers three program stream services: child and youth, health, and justice. The dedicated and highly trained counsellors support kids and their families to cope with physical and emotional concerns, which offers seamless care and support.

This award-winning, cutting-edge organization is a leader in the human services sector, but it also partners with other support organizations to further strengthen the fabric of Albertan communities by therapeutically engaging the body, mind, and soul of each participant to become fully functioning, contributing members of their family and community.

The work at Enviros enhances and improves the outcomes for the young people who are supported by Albertans through the ministries of Children's Services, Justice, and Health.

Young people form the foundation of Alberta's future, and the excellent programs offered at Enviros ensure that the future will be a bright one for all kids regardless of what challenges they may face.

Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago, when I was honoured to serve as the chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, I took the opportunity to visit this fine facility, and I can assure you it is absolutely world class. I trust that all members of this Assembly will join me now in congratulating everyone at Enviros for working miracles every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Wildrose Alliance Alternative Budget

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In football when a wide receiver hears footsteps behind him, he usually drops the ball. The knowledge of a potential impact from the oncoming opponent causes him to flinch and mishandle the ball thrown in his direction. On Friday the finance minister dropped a ball of his own, but it wasn't the footsteps of a rushing defensive back that he heard. No. It was the confident march of the Wildrose that caused him to fumble. In a frenzied huff he scrambled together a news conference attacking the Wildrose balanced budget alternative, which is a very sensible plan. The spectacle of a finance minister criticizing and responding to an opposition budget was quite something to

see. In fact, it gave us pleasure to know that we got the government's attention.

Yesterday the government, like an opposition in waiting, asked their questions about our budget, wanting to know the details of how we would stretch out our capital plan from three to four years. We'd be happy to answer their questions, but despite repeated requests from the Wildrose bench this government still refuses to release its secret list of infrastructure projects. Mr. Speaker, Albertans need to see this list so we can start prioritizing between what the government wants and what Albertans' actual needs are. Right now that is a list that is being hidden by a government that claims to be open and transparent.

I don't know what the definitions of openness and transparency are to this government, but let me remind them from the *Webster* dictionary. Openness: exposed to a general view or knowledge existing; carried on without concealment. Transparency: the availability of complete information required on collective decision-making. Mr. Speaker, I suspect this is why the minister heard footsteps on Friday. These are values that the Wildrose support.

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

#### Northern Saw-whet Owl Monitoring Program

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Adoption of animals and birds is becoming commonplace, and I was lucky to be allowed to adopt a very special owl, the saw-whet, which flies free and proud throughout the province. Weighing in at about two to four ounces, the saw-whet owl uses Lesser Slave Lake as a nesting ground. Organizations such as the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation have been working hard to help Albertans get to know this tiny, tiny boreal forest resident. Through the northern saw-whet owl monitoring program researchers catch and band the owls, and Albertans then have the ability to adopt them as they so wish. This allows also for the monitoring of long-term population trends. They also record the owls' vital information such as weight and height to allow for even more insight into their demographics and biometrics.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this month the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation teamed up with Northern Lakes College to offer two free programs to bird lovers all across Alberta. Through an online web conferencing program people were able to ask questions, watch videos, and participate in activities designed to help them learn about the owls and other birds in the Lesser Slave Lake region. A similar online session on spring migration also took place recently.

I am very proud to represent an area of our great province that is rich with wildlife and nature. I'm even more proud that the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation and Northern Lakes College have developed a program designed to bring these tiny treasures to your doors and to your living rooms all across this province. I encourage all Albertans to get out and learn as much as they can about the many unique species of wildlife found in our province, especially the northern saw-whet owl.

Thank you.

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

#### Melody Singers

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This February the Southeast Edmonton Seniors Association Melody Singers celebrated their 30th anniversary. Since its humble beginnings this choir has shared the gift of song with the community, taking engagements

at nursing homes, seniors' lodges, and auxiliary hospitals in Edmonton. It is with pleasure that I recognize the Melody Singers' 30-year commitment to choral music this afternoon.

Late in 1980 a notice asking for singers was posted on the bulletin board of the Southeast Edmonton Seniors Association. The first meeting was organized by co-ordinator Anne Zalasky and was attended by just two individuals, Fred Stebner and Muriel Miekke. At their second meeting the group had more than quadrupled in size. At their third meeting, held on February 16, 1981, the group included 14 voices. Membership increased steadily, and by September 1981 the choir had grown to include 26 voices.

With increased membership Fred Stebner found it increasingly difficult to sing and direct at the same time. He was the only bass singer at the time. In October 1981 Ms Vivian Phillips, a former piano teacher and a member of the Richard Eaton Singers, graciously agreed to take over direction of the choir.

The choir made its debut performance during K Days that year at the Parkland nursing home. Dressed in Klondike attire, I'm sure that the choir brightened the day for many of the patients. That first year the choir also participated in the Northgate Lions seniors' choir festival and provided three performances of Christmas carols at the Convention Inn.

The Melody Singers remain an active choir and now includes 38 members. The choir, which meets on Tuesday afternoons, is currently under the directorship of Ann Marshall. The choir performs three Christmas concerts, a spring concert, and they take part in Remembrance Day services annually. The choir will formally celebrate their 30th anniversary at their spring concert, being held this year on May 1.

Thank you.

#### Introduction of Bills

**The Speaker:** The hon. President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

#### Bill 9

#### Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2011

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2011. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

1:50

#### Oral Question Period

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

#### Emergency Room Wait Times

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the House I raised the troubling issue of emergency wait times and the targets that are not being met. The Premier's response that wait times are down contradicts the acting CEO of Alberta Health Services, who publicly said, I quote: we are not close to meeting performance targets, and we are not confident in where we are today. To the Premier: who are Albertans supposed to believe on such a critical issue, a Premier who apparently relies on Twitter for his ER updates or a CEO who has all but admitted that current management may not be able to meet these targets?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, what I said yesterday is that wait times in the ER are improving. Even though all of the very aggressive targets have not been met, I'm not going to punish the health care providers that have to make those decisions on a daily basis, but there is marked improvement in working towards meeting those targets.

**Dr. Swann:** Far from aggressive targets, Mr. Speaker. We have compromised the national targets substantially in Alberta.

How can Albertans have any confidence whatever in this government's ability to manage health care when the CEO of Alberta Health Services is not confident in what they are doing today in the ER?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I indicated yesterday to this House that I would bring forward some exact numbers next week, and I will do that. In the meantime let's keep in mind here some of the outstanding progress that is being made in the emergency departments. This member of all members in this House should know how complex health systems are around the world, including this province. In Calgary hospitals, for example, the average that we're looking at here for the number of people waiting for an in-patient bed going from emergency up to acute dropped from 53 to 21 over the last three, four months.

**Dr. Swann:** Four years, Mr. Speaker, we've been asking this government. Four years been looking for leadership on health care, and you have bungled and bungled and bungled it. The Liberals have called for measures like mobilizing health professionals, opening mothballed facilities to address this crisis. When is the Premier going to act on these recommendations?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, you know what we have in this province? We have the world's first live shoulder cartilage transplant, based at the McCaig institute. We have the most MRI exams per capita in Canada. We have a physician workforce that has grown by 50 per cent in the past decade compared to a national average of 20 per cent. Our nursing workforce has grown by 12 per cent in the past four years whereas nationally it's only 6 per cent. You know why? Because this is a darn good place to practise because we have one of the best health care systems anywhere.

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

### Provincial Budget

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the fourth deficit budget in a row. The sustainability fund is soon to run dry. The government acts as though they're playing with an endless supply of Monopoly money, and they can just start the game over when they go bankrupt. Folks on the far right say the government has a spending problem. On the far left they say the government has a revenue problem. Alberta Liberals are not afraid to say: this is a management problem. Will the finance minister answer the following: when will the incompetent government stop playing games and throwing money at problems, start following the advice of the Alberta Liberals?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, budgeting is not a game. When we budget in this House for health care, for seniors, for children's services, every single decision we make affects people's lives, not only the jobs of the people that provide it but the people we're providing care for. So I just want to tell the hon. member very

clearly: budgeting may be numbers, but it's about people, and this government cares about people.

**Dr. Swann:** If this government cared about people, it would cut the bloated cabinet from 24 to 17.

Yesterday the Premier outlined that we must "set savings aside," yet this government will have bankrupted the sustainability fund in just another year. Why should Albertans trust this government when you're bankrupting the province and continuing to use this rainy-day fund as a Tory re-election fund?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member doesn't have the facts quite straight. There are two funds that the province has. One is the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, that was set aside a number of years ago. Had we taken all of the windfall that we managed to accumulate during very high oil prices and set all that money in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, we would have lost 37 per cent of that fund. We were wise. We set it aside in a separate fund, the sustainability fund, which is allowing us to work through one of the deepest recessions without making very severe cuts to Alberta's most vulnerable.

**Dr. Swann:** And don't forget the heritage savings trust fund, that has no more value than when Peter Lougheed left office 20-odd years ago.

Since accurate forecasting has not been this government's strong suit, how can Albertans trust the government to eventually balance the books when all we've seen is red ink and an empty cookie jar that once had \$17 billion in it?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons we set aside \$17 billion is to work through one of the most difficult recessions. I want to remind the House and especially the hon. minister that the operations of government are balanced. The amount of deficit is really in the capital grants that go out to municipalities and to health institutions and school boards for the construction of much-needed infrastructure. And we're going to continue to build that infrastructure because now is the best time. We have labour available, costs are down, and I'm not going to delay that infrastructure anymore. Every school that we build is almost full as soon as it opens.

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

### Canadian Strategy Group

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Health and Wellness invited the Liberal opposition to communicate directly with Alberta Health Services. Well, Mr. Minister, it's not so simple. Earlier this winter we were working with AHS to arrange a meeting when suddenly all arrangements from their end were being channelled through a company called Canadian Strategy Group, owned by one Hal Danchilla. To the minister: why is AHS arranging its meetings with the opposition through an expensive lobbyist company owned by a Tory crony?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** I gather the gist of the question is something about having a meeting. You want to have a meeting? Let's go have a meeting. What's the issue?

**Dr. Taft:** You've got to pay more attention than that, Mr. Minister.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** There's too much yelling over there.



**Dr. Taft:** You weren't paying attention. [interjections] You pipe down and listen.

Given that Mr. Danchilla is a professional lobbyist who is well known to be extremely partisan for the Tory party, will this minister admit that having Mr. Danchilla's company broker meetings between AHS and the opposition is clearly intended to intimidate AHS staff and stifle open communications?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know the matter that he's driving at at all. I've offered that if he wants to have a meeting, then let's go have a meeting.

What I can tell this House is that yesterday this hon. member brought up something that he called a law to do with the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. He misled the House a little bit, and I thought maybe he would take the opportunity to apologize for that. That act hasn't even been proclaimed yet, so perhaps he should start by correcting himself there, and then we'll move on to this second issue.

**Dr. Taft:** Given that the previous minister of health care, Gary Mar, was politically burned when he inappropriately put a partisan named Kelley Charlebois on the public payroll, will this minister of health take the responsible action and tell Alberta Health Services to terminate their relations with Mr. Danchilla?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I regret I'm not informed at all about any such relationship, but if it's one of those matters where this hon. member again wants me to help do his job, I'll be happy to undertake that as well. I did your job for you yesterday; I'll do this one for you today. [interjections]

## 2:00 Provincial Budget Advertisements

**Mr. Anderson:** It's getting hot in here, Mr. Speaker.

This government talks a lot about respect for taxpayers' money, yet their actions speak much louder than their words. On the airwaves right now there are feel-good advertisements being broadcast by this government, promoting a budget they haven't even passed yet. The ads talk about holding the line on spending while making sure that every penny is spent wisely. This is blatant partisan advertising, using taxpayer money to promote a party agenda. To the minister of finance: how much money is this government spending on these PC infomercials?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** We're not spending one cent on a PC infomercial. Mr. Speaker, the government is spending about \$165,000 total to inform Albertans about this budget. It's being spent in the major centres and in the small local newspapers around Alberta, and it's also going through many of the ethnic newspapers in our larger cities. We feel it's important for all Albertans to have an opportunity to understand the budget.

**Mr. Anderson:** That is not good enough for Alberta taxpayers, sir.

Given that we have a \$3.4 billion deficit and given that we have a \$6.1 billion cash shortfall and given that our savings fund will be vaporized by you, sir, within the next two years, will this minister remember what it means to be fiscally responsible, show some leadership, and cancel this egregious abuse of taxpayer dollars for partisan purposes?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, I think he just made my case for spending some money to show Albertans what their budget is about. This budget explains the priorities that we've got, the money that's being spent on the different departments. It also

shows the fact that in good years we set aside a savings account to bridge through cash-flow shortages to better years ahead, and that's exactly what we're doing on their behalf.

**Mr. Anderson:** Then, Mr. Minister, tell me this: if you're giving these advertisements for the public good, why don't those advertisements say that you're running a \$3.4 billion deficit, a \$6.1 billion cash shortfall, with \$115 million spent on new MLA offices? Why don't you be truthful with Albertans for a change and put those in your infomercial, sir?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, one thing that has been agreed upon by this Auditor General, by the previous Auditor General, and by the Canadian accounting institute is that our books from this government are the standard that all provinces try to achieve. They are complicated. A budget document this thick is complicated, and there are many parts to it. We have offered staff from Treasury to try and explain it to some members of the opposition so that they could try and understand accepted accounting principles. Apparently, we're not being too successful.

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

## Wait Times for Cancer Treatment

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this House allegations were raised that mismanagement of the health care system caused the unnecessary deaths of cancer patients. Albertans are owed an answer to three questions: (a) was there a significant and disproportionate increase in cancer surgery wait times at any time in the last decade, (b) did people die as a result of waiting too long for crucial cancer surgery, and (c) was there a cover-up? I would like to give the minister of health the opportunity to set the record straight. Will this minister of health provide Albertans with a clear and unequivocal answer to these vital questions?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't do it all in 30 seconds, but let me just give that hon. member and the rest of Albertans some comfort that people waiting for cancer surgeries, for example, important help with their cancer problem, have been receiving it. In fact, I can tell you right now that according to the Health Quality Council and their report last December there has been no loss of confidence in the system and that 90 per cent of patients were treated within 3.7 weeks for cancer treatment. That's a dramatic change from four or five years ago.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, the minister says that it's a dramatic change from three or four years ago, but it's three or four years ago that we're talking about.

Given that everyone in this House recognizes that the minister of health is very adept at answering questions or not answering them as he sees fit, we have to conclude that he's avoiding giving Albertans a clear and honest answer to very serious allegations. I must ask: what is the minister hiding?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, what I find interesting is that this member has taken up the cause of furthering even more allegations. It's very unfortunate when a member of this House stands up and uses the protection and the shield of immunity that this House provides and then casts aspersions or casts accusations or allegations against people that they know can't come in here and defend themselves. That is just absolutely wrong.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has failed twice now to answer the questions about whether there was an increase in surgery times a few years ago that caused people to die by waiting too long for surgery and whether or not there was a cover-up and given that I gave him a chance to clear the air, the fact that he's refusing to do so says to me and, I think, says to the people of Alberta that this minister is hiding something. So, Mr. Minister, what are you hiding?

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They deny any of those allegations. They have not heard of anything. I spoke with the Health Quality Council. They have no idea of those accusations. I've spoken with former ministers of health of this Assembly. They have no idea of all of that. As soon as other people who are still on holidays get back here, I'll be quizzing them as well. In the meantime, let's not let these allegations get too far out of hand here, please.

Access is there. A five-year funding plan is there. Outstanding care is being delivered across the province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

#### Political Contributions by Municipal Officials

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs noted in this House that a number of other municipalities had to repay taxpayers after submitting personal expense claims for tickets to political events. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will he table the names of the other municipalities that had to repay taxpayers for the benefit of all Albertans?

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to reiterate what I said yesterday, certainly there are some rules and regulations around the contributions from municipalities to political activities, and those rules are very, very clear. That was reinforced by the Chief Electoral Officer in a letter dated October 1, 2010, to municipalities, that indicated to them that municipalities could not make political contributions nor reimburse an individual for political contributions.

**Ms Pastoor:** Given that the mayor of Rimbey claimed that nothing was done wrong and that if you spend money in the right place, you're going to bring it home, good Lord, and this is a prevalent perception, how is this equality for all Albertans from this PC government?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, specifically to the Rimbey issue, the councillors did make some contributions, actually claimed some of the expenses, and upon realizing that they had made a mistake, agreed to pay it back. They realized that that was there, so they paid all of their expenses back to the town of Rimbey.

**Ms Pastoor:** The perception is different than what the minister's answer is. This is the perception out there. Does the minister believe that he should set the record straight for all municipalities by advising them in writing that they should be aware of the sections of the Municipal Government Act that he quoted from yesterday?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, that has happened, and certainly as I was indicating in my first response, there was a letter dated October 1, 2010, from the provincial Chief Electoral Officer to all municipalities, all the CEOs of the municipalities, advising them of the rules around political contributions.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, you quoted from a document. Would you kindly table it at the appropriate time?

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

#### Industrial Energy Efficiency Projects

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All my questions are to the Minister of the Environment. Yesterday the government participated in the Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation's announcement of \$27.2 million in funding for industrial energy efficiency projects. This is great news, with six innovative projects being awarded funding. I understand that there was a total of 52 expressions of interest submitted. Can the minister assure this House and all Albertans that these projects were selected and awarded in a fair manner?

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly can give that assurance to this member and to all members of the House. The RFP process is as open and transparent as is humanly possible. As the member indicated, there were 52 expressions of interest. Those were reviewed by an independent board, and a number of projects were selected for full proposal. That independent board, comprised of industry representatives, academia, municipalities as well as public at large, then made the final selection. Then on top of that there is an internal fairness audit as well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member, please.

2:10

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I have been told that yesterday's funding announcement adds dollars that were already committed by a corporation in a previous funding announcement. Is this just a PR stunt? When will we finally start seeing real reductions in emissions and steel in the ground on these innovative projects?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. This emissions management corporation has had three different rounds of funding announcements, this being the most recent. My understanding is that projects are expected to begin within the next year and should see real reductions at the source as early as June of 2012.

The projects yesterday alone, Mr. Speaker, will amount to reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at an estimated 3.2 megatons over the next 10 years, so these are real reductions from a program that is working.

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister. While I applaud the goals of these investments, some of my constituents are questioning why the government is subsidizing private business projects. How are Albertans going to get value for the dollars being invested in these projects?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I need to remind all members that these dollars are dollars that are contributed by business under our compliance mechanisms incorporated into our large emitters legislation, so these are not general revenue tax dollars that fund this program.

Over and above that, Mr. Speaker, I think it's interesting to note that the rate at which the leveraging occurs on these programs is

about 5 to 1, so to date approximately a hundred million dollars have been expended by this board, and that has resulted in about a \$500 million investment.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

#### Logging in the Castle Special Management Area

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals have long pressed for the creation of the 1,040 square kilometre Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp provincial park in the Castle-Crown area of southern Alberta. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: given that a coalition of 23 tourism and recreation businesses in southern Alberta are cautioning businesses in the sector to be aware of the negative impact of clear-cutting before investing or expanding in the area, has the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development ever discussed the potential impacts of logging in the Castle area with your department?

**Mrs. Ady:** Well, thank you, hon. member. I'm well aware of the fact that there are those groups that have asked for this designation, but as you know, these lands currently sit under Sustainable Resources. Yes, we do have discussions, but as to your question, I would say that the minister for sustainable resources needs to answer it.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. My second question is again to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Will you designate the Castle wilderness as protected within the province's network of protected areas and parks?

**Mrs. Ady:** Well, hon. member, you're also aware of the land-use framework that is at play and that this is one of the pieces that we're looking at. So as that is developed, we will have those opportunities, but until that comes forward and we have that discussion, I think you're a little early.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. We're all aware of the land-use framework being put on hold while business after questionable business takes place, whether it's potatoes or trees. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given the tanking value of softwood lumber there is no business case to be made for clear-cut logging in the Castle area. Therefore, how can the minister possibly give clear-cutting a priority over sustainable, economic investment returns?

**Mr. Knight:** You know, Mr. Speaker, it would be interesting, of course, for the member opposite to take a little look at commodity pricing, particularly softwood lumber pricing, over, let's say, a period of the last 12, 14 months because, to start off with, his preamble, which is not supposed to be allowed, actually indicated that the price of softwood lumber is tanking. You know, I would suggest that he goes and takes a look at it. The commodity pricing, actually, for softwood lumber has increased remarkably in the last number of months.

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

#### Securities Regulation

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the proposed merger between the Toronto and London stock exchanges in the news, securities regulation continues to be a topic of interest across the country. My first question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Is Alberta still opposed to the idea of a single federal securities regulator?

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

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you and all Albertans that we remain firmly committed to our opposition to the attempt by the federal government to push their way into provincial jurisdiction. There's no evidence to support the purported need for such a regulator. In fact, we see very tangible proof as we come out of this recession that the system that we have now works. This is clearly a case of: if it's not broken, don't fix it. The passport feature has virtually all of the features that the purported system would have without the need for the radical change they're proposing.

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

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Given that the province of British Columbia, once a supporter of the federal regulator, has recently come out in opposition to this particular issue, can the minister comment on whether this has any benefit or implication for Alberta?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we obviously appreciate any support for it. In fact, B.C. did support originally, and the head of their securities regulator went to work on a transition team. Since then, B.C. has changed their position to where they feel it is pushing into areas of provincial jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, I would take this opportunity to congratulate Christy Clark, the new leader of the B.C. Liberal Party and the next Premier, and to pass on our best wishes. I look forward to working with her on this issue in the future.

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

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental, again to the same minister: what is the level of support across the country for the federal government push to establish a single regulator?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Well, Mr. Speaker, originally just Alberta and Quebec were out there challenging this proposal. Since then, six provinces have filed opposing briefs with the Supreme Court. Joining Alberta and Quebec are Manitoba, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick. It only shows that we got it right early, and we have the support of most provinces except Ontario.

#### ESL Program Funding

**Mr. Hehr:** Mr. Speaker, for the past five years Alberta Education has been providing enhanced English as a second language programs for children of refugees, many of whom do not speak a lick of English. In my view, it was a valuable program that provided refugee children with the opportunity to succeed, but this government announced last week that this program will be cut. My question today is for the Minister of Education. Does cutting this program brighten the future prospects of these refugee children?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, my view would be that it should not. In fact, it's not the program that's being cut; it's the enhanced funding that's being cut. We fund extra to the per-student grant across the province for every student, \$1,155 for ESL funding. The enhanced grant was put in place six years ago, when there was a larger number of refugee and immigrant children coming into the province, and it was believed that we needed to put more resources in to help enhance those programs and learn how to do it better. Over the six years I hope that we have learned how to do it better and that we're now able to provide that kind of programming . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member, please.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just talked to some teachers, and they assured me that more minority and ESL students and refugee students are coming to this province than ever before, so in their view more funding, not less, is needed. Would you agree with their characterization of this funding cut?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, what you just characterized is that more students are coming; therefore, they need more money. I would assure the hon. member that for every student that comes, there's that \$1,155 grant for ESL funding. It's the enhanced grant that was put in place to help school boards develop better programming and better ways, techniques of dealing with the extra issues related to those particular students, and over the last six years we hope that they actually have enhanced their programming and learned how to do it better. They should be able to serve those students with the . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member, please.

**Mr. Hehr:** That enhanced funding was put in the classrooms, and it was used very nicely in the classrooms in support of these children.

I guess that if we're here to investigate what the true cost is, what is the dollar amount that your ministry actually saved by cutting this ESL program?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I would be very happy to answer that during estimates, but I think I can probably give him an answer in just a second or two. Approximately \$12,993,347.

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

## 2:20 Affordable Housing in Calgary

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. As the MLA for several vibrant inner-city communities I understand the balance between building safe communities and protecting vulnerable Albertans. How can this minister ensure that the communities in my area are not overwhelmed with shelters for the homeless?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question. I would put to this member that, in fact, throughout the entire province we have a province-wide responsibility for affordable housing and homelessness and not just in that particular area of the city. We do have some projects there. But every year we make an RFP, and through the RFP we go through a co-ordinated process and ensure that there is not a particular concentration in any particular community. So that is a good question, but we are on this with the scatter-based model of affordable housing.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Some people believe that society's nonprofit groups cannot compete with private developers in housing grants. How can the minister ensure that the changing needs of seniors are reflected in the grant proposal and that they are not simply reflecting the wishes of the private developers?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member does bring up a point again about the need for a changing housing policy. We do that every year. Private developers, nonprofits, municipalities: everybody is treated equally, and we go on a merit basis on the basis that the taxpayers' dollar is paramount. Last year we were able to get our cost per unit down to \$97,500 because of using this open and competitive tendering process.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what assurance can I give people looking to develop more housing for seniors in Calgary's inner city?

**Mr. Denis:** Again, we will be having an RFP actually this year as we move closer to the goal of 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012. But, as always, the number one priority is the taxpayer, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue on with that process.

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

## Oil Sands Reclamation

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Environment tried to explain his failure to consult with the public before adopting a sweetheart reclamation security deal with the oil industry. The minister said that the issue was "very complex." Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not complex. Albertans stand to be on the hook for billions, and Albertans deserve to be heard on this issue. Will the minister apologize to Albertans for his condescension and admit that they have a right to be heard?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I stand by my comments yesterday. This is an issue that requires a significant amount of policy development. That has been ongoing for the past two years. At the end of the day Albertans make their wishes very well known to this minister and to every other minister, and I appreciate that comment. But this is not the kind of an issue that would entail a broad-based public consultation.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the lobbyist registry shows that, among others, Syncrude and Teck Resources were consulted on the new plan and given that the same registry shows no record of consultation with community groups, environmental groups, municipalities, taxpayers, will this minister rethink what he just said and correct this shameful consultation record and commit to scrapping the program until after he receives input from a broad range of Alberta's citizens?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, my understanding of the rationale and the reason that we have a lobbyist registry is so that unsolicited lobbying that is done in this place and has been done for decades is done with transparency and in the open. When we as a government request input from someone, it shouldn't matter whether or

not they are listed as a lobbyist. The fact of the matter is that we have to have input from the industry that we are regulating. It's done on a daily, regular basis. It has to take place, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms Notley:** You need input from all Albertans, Mr. Minister.

Now, given that the Royal Society stated in December that "current practices for obtaining financial security for reclamation liability leave Albertans vulnerable to major financial risks" and given that your new plan will reduce what it's collecting over the next 10 years, why won't you admit that your government's capitulation to the oil industry once again behind closed doors is a mistake and that you've sold out Albertans one more time?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, the member asks me why I won't admit that we have done something. Why won't this member admit that she is misrepresenting the facts in this case? The fact is that we are increasing the amount of security over the period and the life of the mine significantly. That member knows perfectly well that that's the case.

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

### Provincial Borrowing

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the next three fiscal years the government plans to borrow directly over \$3 billion for the Alberta Treasury Branches. Why is the government doing this now?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Well, Mr. Speaker, because we have historically low interest rates, and with our triple-A credit rating we are able to borrow money for periods of time; for example, one five-year term at less than 3 per cent. This money is going to be used if we need to continue to invest in Alberta infrastructure. It's taking a cash asset and making a solid asset: a road, a school, a hospital. It's the right time to borrow. It's smart use of debt.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. I thought we were out of the business of being in business. This has to do with the \$3 billion that you plan to borrow in the next three years for the Alberta Treasury Branches. It has nothing to do with infrastructure. Again, where will the government of Alberta place this \$3 billion liability on its books?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, the money that we have borrowed is in our books now. We have voted authority to borrow more this year. We may proceed to the market. It's not borrowed from the Treasury Branches or deposited to the Treasury Branches. It's deposited into our sustainability fund after it's borrowed, and it's shown exactly in our budget.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. I'm disappointed the minister doesn't understand the question.

Now, why are Alberta taxpayers taking on this \$3 billion liability for what is supposedly a Crown corporation that's independent and separate from this government?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, the borrowing has nothing to do with the Treasury Branches. I understood the question; you didn't understand it. It has nothing to do with the Treasury Branches whatsoever.

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

### Film and Television Tax Credit

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's film, television, and digital media industries are invaluable to our province. However, I've heard from a number of constituents in the industry over time, and they're not working right now. They say that Alberta is not as competitive as other provinces and states. Other jurisdictions utilize tax credit models that entice and attract production and investment. My questions are for the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Can he please clarify why Alberta does not have a film tax credit like everyone else?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason that Alberta didn't have a tax credit is that when we looked at it first a couple of years ago, most jurisdictions were in a race to the bottom. You've got jurisdictions like Michigan and New Mexico right now who are reducing or looking at eliminating their tax credits because they can't afford them. However, through our film advisory group with our commissioners, our unions and guilds, and our producers we are looking at a cultural industry tax credit that will give an incentive for private individuals and companies to invest in those productions, and we're continuing to work on that model.

**Mr. Rodney:** My next question is to the same minister. What sort of homework has your department done to ensure that despite utilizing a different model, Alberta is still competitive in this industry? Where do we stack up?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I was just down in Los Angeles about five weeks ago and asked the financial representatives for companies like both Disney and Warner Bros., and they told us that we are competitive with the tax incentive that we have, the Alberta multimedia development fund. We pay out cash, which they like, we pay it out two months after production is completed, which they like, we have the money in the bank, unlike other jurisdictions, and we can guarantee that they'll get paid. They tell us that for productions under \$30 million we're competitive with every jurisdiction in North America.

**Mr. Rodney:** My final question is to the same minister. Can he please explain what the return on investment for this trip was? Can he share with our friends in the industry what new and specific project deals were made as a result of the trip?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, Mr. Speaker, because of contract negotiations I can't release the specific details until those contracts are signed. The information will be released by either the studios or those producers. But I can tell you that we learned some valuable things. One, as a jurisdiction the Canadian dollar doesn't matter anymore. There's no discount. We all have to be competitive based on our merits, so based on our quality of productions, based on our crew, based on our locations, and based on the availability of talent we have in our province.

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

### Capital Budget

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fearmongering and failed leadership of this government continue. Instead of taking

responsibility for their record deficits, the finance minister lashes out at anyone who proposes a credible solution. Capital spending in this province is out of control. It is 50 per cent higher than any other province, and this is unsustainable. In a few years the province's savings will be vaporized. To the minister of finance: will he explain how his capital spending program is sustainable at this high level for the next ten years?

2:30

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, we have a capital strategy. It's a 20-year strategy that lays out for Albertans what we're going to need to enable business to grow and for the people that deliver on our behalf education and health, the schools and the hospitals. We have a three-year funded capital plan right now because we have money in the bank. Unfortunately for the opposition there, the future looks very bright in Alberta. While we are spending at a rate one and a half times other provinces, we have a very, very growing population. We have a growing economy. We have a bright future in spite of how they'd like to look at it. These projects need to be completed. The ring road, the south Calgary hospital, the south Calgary ring road: they're all important to Albertans.

**Mr. Hinman:** Mr. Speaker, were his fingers crossed while he was trying to answer that one?

Given that this government has committed to a five-year stable funding in health care but not for capital spending, only three years, where projects take decades to develop, and given that this lack of stable planning earlier in the decade created a yoyo effect, which decimated the construction industry in 2003 and then fuelled an inflation that followed, will the minister stop fuelling the boom-and-bust cycles in construction and commit to a sustainable, transparent . . .

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, what we are committed to is a responsible capital plan that addresses the immediate and the long-term needs of the province of Alberta. We do it in all aspects of health care, of education, for seniors, the infrastructure we need for the roads. It's laid out in the plan. It is supported by our 20-year strategic plan, it's supported by cash in the bank, and it's supported by Albertans.

**Mr. Hinman:** It's being supported by a hundred thousand dollars plus campaign. The adage about whether you say you can or you can't applies here.

Given that the minister has now had a weekend to look at the Wildrose balanced budget alternative, which balances increases to core social programs with cuts to wasteful pet projects and slight extensions to the capital plan to erase the deficit this year, will he accept our invitation to sit down with our finance critic on ways to reduce the deficit?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** I'm not sure whether it's unfortunate or fortunate. I couldn't hear all of the question because of some of the noise, and that probably was fortunate.

We consulted with Albertans who have a positive outlook on Alberta on an ongoing basis. We probably consulted with over a hundred groups last year. What I would like to point out in an irrelevant way: you replaced all the bulbs in the roof, Mr. Speaker, but some are still burnt out there.

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

## Provincial Fees

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the government announced its new budget, it included an increase in motor vehicle licensing and registration as well as land titles and corporate registry fees. There seems to be some confusion in what's included and when it takes effect. To the Minister of Service Alberta: can you make it clear what this increase includes and when it will take effect?

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to clear up some of the confusion on the fee increases. Effective April 1, 2011, vehicle licences and registrations as well as various land titles and corporate registry fees will increase. Even with this increase Alberta will be very competitive with other parts of Canada. For example, registering your car in Alberta is still 16 per cent below the national average.

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

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second question to the same minister: why do these fees have to go up at all?

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last time these fees were raised was in 2002, approximately nine years ago. The cost of doing business has steadily increased with salaries, systems development, and maintenance costs. Service Alberta has been covering these costs, but we need to move into a cost-recovery footing for now and for the future. We needed to increase these fees to better reflect the cost of providing these services to Albertans.

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

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Final question to the same minister: do these fee increases also affect the registration of commercial vehicles? What about nonprofit societies?

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that commercial vehicle registrations and the not-for-profit sector in Alberta will not be impacted by the changes announced in the budget, despite what some have said. Alberta continues to have some of the most competitive fees in the country.

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

## Homelessness Initiative

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year the Calgary Homeless Foundation will lead a project to track homeless people. Yesterday the minister of housing defended the electronic tracking system, and he assured this House that the foundation will be required by law to protect the privacy of homeless people who seek help. Unfortunately, the minister was wrong. To the minister of housing: the Calgary Homeless Foundation is not subject to any privacy laws, so how can the minister claim that the homeless will have any privacy protection?

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

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, the Member for Calgary-McCall is the one who is mistaken here. Subsequent to his question yesterday I called my deputy minister, who has confirmed that the Calgary Homeless Foundation has a contract with us, in fact, that requires them to abide by government privacy legislation. People's privacy is protected in my department.

**Mr. Kang:** Mr. Speaker, the Privacy Commissioner does not protect the homeless shelters. Given that none of the nonprofit homeless shelters tracking individuals are subject to any privacy laws, can the minister explain what a homeless person could do about a breach of privacy?

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, once again, as I mentioned yesterday, we do not fund this particular collection of information by the Calgary Homeless Foundation. As a result of getting funded with us, they have signed a contract, and everybody whose information is collected in that has full and accurate information protection, as they would under any other registration. Period.

**Mr. Kang:** You're still not answering my question.

Given that the electronic surveillance will discourage homeless people from seeking services, is the government's plan to end homelessness actually a plan to drive homeless people away?

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We are being successful in our plan to end homelessness. Our shelter usage is down, and our costs are down 36 per cent. On top of that, homeless people that I've met tell me that they have the best services that they actually have had over the last couple of years because of our 10-year plan to end homelessness. I'm offended that this member goes and maligns this program in this House. Shame on him.

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

### Charter Schools

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta students have diverse needs, and charter schools provide an education which responds to the needs of about 7,500 students in our province. Some of the students reside in my constituency of Calgary-Mackay. One of the requirements for charter schools is that they must have their contracts renewed every five years. All my questions are to the Minister of Education. What importance does the minister and your ministry place on charter schools, an educational system that's unique to this province?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last 15 years I think charter schools have played a very important role in the province. Their original *raison d'être* was to provide choice and to be innovative in the delivery of educational programs, and they've done that. The charter schools have a couple of concerns that they've asked us to deal with, and we intend to deal with those concerns. One of the major concerns is that instead of having a five-year renewable charter, they get some manner of permanence. We're currently examining how we can do that and still maintain the *raison d'être* of choice and innovation and being leading edge in education in the province.

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

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education recently concluded an online survey directed at charter school parents and educators. What can the minister tell us about the information being collected from these surveys, and how will this change charter schools from their present form?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have had an ongoing consultation with Albertans in engaging Albertans in a discussion about Inspiring Education. This discussion paper around charter schools is one more step in that process of involving not just charter schools in the discussion but the broader base of education stakeholders and the community in a discussion about the importance of charter schools and what the parameters for charter schools operating in the future might be. We started that consultation based on a paper that was produced which talked about research and innovation, so the consultation was framed around that, but it's a broader consultation based on the role and function of charter schools in the broader education system.

2:40

**Ms Woo-Paw:** My constituents who have children enrolled in charter schools have expressed a concern that these facilities will move toward a more research-based system, thereby turning their children's classroom into an educational laboratory. What sort of research is being conducted in these classrooms, and how does it differ from that compiled in public school classrooms at present?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, research is always important, and data gathering is important. We have research that we apply to the classrooms, and we take the application from the classrooms and put it into research. It's an important function in both charter schools and public schools. We talked earlier about the AISI program and the need to do research and apply it in classroom settings to improve our education system. One of the *raison d'être* of a charter school was to be innovative. It makes sense that we would follow that innovation, discover what is done to enhance the educational opportunities for those students, learn from it, and help translate that into the broader public system.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, 18 members were recognized today. There were 108 questions and answers.

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Oral Questions

**The Speaker:** Before we move on to the next order of business, though, this being day 5, I'm sort of thinking to myself that maybe some very bad habits are being developed in the Assembly. I would just like to refer members once again to that section of *Beauchesne* that deals with oral questions. I'd just like to put into the record again some of the basic guidelines that we use. These are dealing with questions in the Oral Question Period.

- (1) It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate.

There were 18 sets today. You can go through them and do your own homework a little later this afternoon and see how many would violate that one.

- (2) The question must be brief. A preamble need not exceed one carefully drawn sentence. A long preamble on a long question takes an unfair share of time and provokes the same sort of reply. A supplementary question should need no preamble.

In addition to that, I have sworn documents, signed, saying that nobody will violate the preamble principles. Signed, again. Signatures there. Words have to mean something.

(3) The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.

(4) It ought to be on an important matter, and not be frivolous.

(5) The matter ought to be of some urgency. There must be some present value in seeking the information during the Question Period rather than through the Order Paper or through correspondence with the Minister or the department.

There are a whole series of others in addition to that.

Please, got some time later today, this afternoon? Just check out *Beauchesne* to see exactly what these guidelines are because you don't want to drive all the people away from the galleries. There are only three left today after only one hour and 12 minutes. We started off with packed galleries. Obviously, these people have other things on their agenda, or they're not impressed with what they see happening.

Let's please proceed now.

**Ms Blakeman:** Mr. Speaker, point of order.

**The Speaker:** Point of order?

#### Point of Order

#### Answers to Oral Questions

**Ms Blakeman:** Yes, sir, under 13(2). Thank you very much for the reminder. I'm sure that it's very valuable to everyone in this House. I'm just wondering if there's any citation that is able to be used to require an answer to the question?

**The Speaker:** The hon. member knows full well that there isn't. There are many citations, and they basically say: this is called Oral Question Period. I've stated time and time again that it's not called oral answer period. There are many, many citations with respect to answers, but we're talking about the Oral Question Period.

**Ms Blakeman:** What a shame. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, this tradition has evolved over a thousand years. So shame on all those people for 1,000 years of development of this parliamentary democratic principle.

### Introduction of Bills

(continued)

**The Speaker:** We're back to the Routine. I'll now recognize the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

#### Bill 10

#### Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 10, Alberta Land Stewardship Amendment Act, 2011. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, two years ago the government embarked on a regional planning process for the province to plan for the future needs of Albertans and manage our growth responsibly. We have worked forward with those plans. There has been some suggestion, as I've travelled Alberta and we've worked on moving forward with the planning process, that Albertans had some con-

cern relative to the legislation that, in fact, is going to provide support for those very much needed regional plans. This bill, the amendment act for the Land Stewardship Act, is a piece of legislation that will address, I think, the majority of Albertans' concerns that I've heard over the past period of time.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, did you have a tabling as a follow-up to your question?

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. Not a report, just tablings.

**The Speaker:** Tablings, yes.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings, with the five copies required, from persons who are very upset about the clear-cutting in the Castle special management place: Jacques Thouin from Pincher Creek, Torey McLeish from Calgary, Cliff Wallis from Calgary, and Susanne Rautio from Victoria, B.C. This is not just a southern Alberta issue. It is for all who tour and recreate in this area.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, I asked you to table a document as a result of a citation. Do you have that ready?

**Ms Pastoor:** No.

**The Speaker:** You'll have it tomorrow?

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.  
Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll make sure she has it tomorrow.

I have a document that I would like to table which references questions I asked the hon. minister of finance today. This document, Provincial Budget Briefs, is from CIBC. It was put out on February 24, and it indicates – and I'm going to quote – that “in the new fiscal year, the Government of Alberta will start borrowing on behalf of . . . Alberta Treasury Branches.”

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling e-mails from the following individuals who are seeking the preservation of the Castle wilderness, many of whom have personally visited the Castle and all of whom believe clear-cutting will damage the ecology, watershed, wildlife, and natural species and must be prohibited at all costs: Lindsey Wallis, Lisa Richards, Margaret Lewis-MacDonald, Kevin Brygidyr, Patricia Thomas, Megan McRae, Adam Beach, Nicole Chaplain-Pearman, Randy Montgomery, Jacques Thouin, Tracey Ferguson, Patrick Mahaffey, Hal Pashler, Allison Hill, Sally Roenisch, Chantal Pattenden, Ken Goble, Dan Ramunno, Sharon Neal, Zanita Lukezich, Helene Walsh, Heather Hood, Patricia Guest, Judith Blakeley, Steve McCabe, Jacquie Barnaby, Carmel Euwen, Cheryl Thomas, Claudia Rustenburg, Chris Wex, Richard Leckenby, Robert Hii, Karsten Heuer, Jeannette (Tenhaaf) Thomas, Andrew Pike, Piumi Abeynayaka, Jenn Chic, Simone Monckton, Robert and Brandi Wright, Sean Kubara, Gordon McLeod, Bill Taylor, Maureen



Raymond, Marcus Peterson, H. Buckmaster, Bonnie Mullin, Jody Overduin, Dr. Pat Brennan, Monika Schaefer, and Andrew Mott.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several hundred more e-mails I will be tabling.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today five copies each of five different letters or e-mails from Dr. Alixe Howlett, Dr. Julia Carter, Dr. Catherine Heimbach, Dr. Nicola Watkins, and Dr. Brendan Vaughan, all concerning the possible ending of funding for the physician and family support program.

Thank you very much.

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

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In my speech yesterday in private members' bills I referred to two documents from the southern Alberta organ and tissue donation program, and they show that in the last year of all the possible organ donors, the end-of-life care, all 100 per cent of their families were approached by HOPE to consent to organ donation.

The second document shows that the families of all, 100 per cent of them – 100 per cent of them – for the last year consented to the donation. Albertans are doing the right thing. One hundred per cent of possible organ donations in southern Alberta were donated.

2:50

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Snelgrove, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans regulation the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans annual reports for the years ended March 31, 2009, and March 31, 2010.

### Calendar of Special Events

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, it being March 1 of the year 2011, I should draw to the attention of all members the significance of the month of March and dates within the month of March. We will be recognizing some of them over the next number of days.

First of all, March is Liver Health Month, National Colorectal Cancer Month, Kidney Health Month, Nutrition Month, National Social Work Month, Red Cross Month, Fraud Prevention Month, Youth Science Month, National Engineering and Geoscience Month.

Now, there are a number of events. Today, March 1, is Self-injury Awareness Day. March 3 is Mahashivaratri, night of worship to Shiva, for people who follow the Hindu persuasion. March 4 is World Day of Prayer, with the focus country in the world this year being Chile. March 4 to 20 is Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. March 5 to 13 is the Tim Hortons Brier from London, Ontario. March 6 is International Children's Day of Broadcasting. March 6 to 12 is Pharmacy Awareness Week, as it is International Women's Week, as it is World Glaucoma Week. March 8 is International Women's Day. March 8 is also Shrove Tuesday and Mardi Gras. March 9 is Ash Wednesday. March 9 to 13 is Canadian Music Week. March 10 is World Kidney Day. March 11 is National Aboriginal Achievement Awards Day. On March 13 daylight saving time begins.

March 13 to 19 is Canadian Agriculture Safety Week; March 14, Commonwealth Day; March 14 to 20, Brain Awareness Week; March 15, World Social Work Day. March 15 is also World Consumer Rights Day. March 17, of course, is St. Patrick's Day. March 20 is Purim, the Jewish observance which begins on the evening of March 19. March 20 is the Journée internationale de la Francophonie. March 20 is French Language Day at the United Nations. March 20 is Holi; the Hindu spring festival begins. March 20 is the vernal equinox, or the spring equinox. March 20 is Sun-Earth Day, as it is World Storytelling Day.

March 21 is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as it is World Poetry Day. March 21 is also the International Day of Nowruz. This is a Persian festival and means "new day." This is a 3,000-year old festival. March 21 to 27 is the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination, as it also is World Salt Awareness Week. March 22 is World Water Day. March 23 is World Meteorological Day. March 24 is World Tuberculosis Day. March 24 is also the International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims. March 25 is the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. March 26 is Purple Day, a global day for epilepsy awareness. March 26 at 8:30 p.m. is Earth Hour. March 27 is World Theatre Day. March 28 to April 24 is Easter Seals Paper Egg Campaign. The Northlands Farm and Ranch Show will be in Edmonton from March 31 to April 2.

### Orders of the Day

#### Government Motions

#### Provincial Fiscal Policies

8. Mr. Snelgrove moved:  
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate February 24: Ms Pastoor]

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you. It's an honour and a pleasure to rise in the House and respond to the budget. It's easy to see a budget as nothing more than a balance sheet, a set of numbers, expenses on one side, revenues on the other. A balanced budget is good, a surplus budget even better, and a deficit budget means trouble, eventually debt.

A government's budget is in a very real sense a moral document, a public trust. It's an expression of a government's priorities. It represents moral choices: we will take more from this group, less from that, support this group but not that group; we will invest here; we won't invest there. Every decision the government makes about its budget has a tremendous impact on real Albertans, Albertans from all walks of life and all corners of the province. The essential goal of a budget is to reflect the people's values and to use their money for the long-term well-being of people, the province, and the land.

I'm glad to see that the government did attempt to follow the Official Opposition's advice to support core people programs – health care, education, social services – but this budget does nothing to support our long-term prosperity, nor does it cut wasteful spending so that core programs can be strengthened not just this year but in perpetuity.

This government has a spending problem and a revenue problem. But the larger truth: this government has a management

problem. This is the fourth deficit budget in a row. The sustainability fund will soon run dry. This government acts as though they're playing with an endless supply of Monopoly money and that they can just start the game over when they go bankrupt. No, this isn't a game, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta Liberals believe in stable funding for core people programs, including health, education, and social services for our most vulnerable, essential public institutions and services that Albertans value tremendously. They protect health and enhance Alberta's productivity and long-term prosperity. We're not playing with Monopoly money here. You can't just start another game when you go bankrupt. Alberta needs a common-sense, Alberta Liberal approach to budgeting, and we have proposed common-sense alternatives that would save taxpayers 1 and a half billion dollars.

Out of 83 MLAs, 24, more than one-quarter, hold cabinet positions. We don't need a cabinet this large. Seventeen ministries could cover the most important bases, saving Albertans roughly \$40 million. Not only does this save millions of dollars; it would also show leadership. It would show that the ruling party is willing to make real sacrifice for the greater good.

We'd also eliminate departmental funding for MLA policy committees, eliminate the Public Affairs Bureau, which spends time and public money promoting this Tory mismanagement and frivolous public relations nonsense such as Your Alberta Online, and the branding initiative or the blatant greenwashing that tries to fight a propaganda war when we should be fighting to protect our environment. No wonder government communications are so often mocked by the media.

Government waste like the \$30,000 copying machine that arrived in my office last year or the new computer that I receive every two years whether mine is having problems or not, the waste on government travel, hospitality, spending on external consultants: all of these can be significantly trimmed. An Alberta Liberal government would do so. We would also scale back our investment in carbon capture and storage. We'd stop pouring tens of millions of taxpayer dollars into rich men's hobbies like horse racing and private golf courses. We'd spread out the spending on capital projects over a longer period of time. All told, our common-sense budget would save taxpayers a billion and a half dollars while protecting people programs that Albertans value most.

While the Official Opposition is dismayed that the government failed to cut wasteful spending, we don't object in principle to the general thrust of the budget. Before the budget was delivered, Alberta Liberals called for this government to protect people programs, and with some notable exceptions the government followed our advice, at least for the short term. But let's have a look at some specific portfolios to see where the government could have done better.

**3:00**

Health spending is about where it should be, and I give the government kudos for that. How it's being spent has some serious questions. About two-thirds of Albertans understand that the crisis in emergency room wait times isn't one of funding; it's a crisis of poor management. You've experimented with health delivery at a massive financial and human cost, built hospitals and clinics without operational funding or front-line health care professionals to run them. You've disbanded the Mental Health Board, AADAC, and the Alberta Cancer Board, replacing them with a centralized bureaucracy that cannot possibly manage the delivery of the vast array of services efficiently, overspending by more than a billion dollars in the transition. Wait times are not getting better, and as

the emergency room and long-term care crisis continues, this government simply rolls out ad hoc solutions to put out each political fire as it springs up. That's not a recipe for long-term success, Mr. Speaker.

The Official Opposition is pleased that funding for AISH, PDD, and Alberta seniors' benefit was not cut, but still an increasing number of Albertans depend on these programs, albeit people who continue well below the poverty line. This month several organizations supporting people with disabilities challenged us as elected representatives to try to live for a month on \$1,180. I know I couldn't, Mr. Speaker. It's rank hypocrisy to index our generous salaries but not our most vulnerable citizens' monthly stipend.

What will it take for this government to realize that vulnerable people living in poverty are much more likely to have mental and physical health problems – addictions, criminal activity, and encounters with violence – eventually costing our public institutions and our communities much more? That's on top of the tragic loss of human potential.

It remains to be seen whether or not the small increase in the seniors' budget will meet rising demand. It's also worth noting that the people who rely on PDD funding are still waiting – still waiting – for the administrative review of last year, which will tell them whether or not their programs will continue. Mr. Speaker, I implore this government to speed up this review so that vulnerable people are not left hanging.

The education budget remains basically static. That's better than cuts, but it doesn't really address the needs set out by this government, who deliver fine rhetoric about transforming the system for a 21st century. Let's face it. This government can barely meet its current obligations to the system, never mind transforming it. Despite reassurances from government, there's no way that this budget can fund new school infrastructure even in towns with major space crunches like Airdrie and Beaumont.

The situation is still more troubling when it comes to advanced education. This is the future of Alberta we're talking about and the key to economic diversity, social progress, and environmental stewardship for the 21st century. Postsecondary students barely rated a mention in the throne speech. Compare that to five years ago, when this same government promised students they would make Alberta's postsecondary tuition costs the most affordable in the country, that there would be enough university or technical spaces for everyone who wanted them. Those promises are long broken, and grants and bursaries have been slashed. To make matters worse, you've suspended the matching grants for the access to the future, hurting our colleges and universities and directly impacting students and alumni who want to donate to their old schools.

Unemployment is still a major concern for Albertans. The economic recovery remains fragile despite this government's wishful predictions, and unemployment was only recently at historic highs for this province. Under these circumstances we have a responsibility to help Albertans who have lost their jobs and are looking for work. But this budget actually reduces income supports for those Albertans. How are they supposed to make ends meet? The budget for retraining and employment programs has been slashed, and now it's harder than ever for young workers entering the job market to find employment thanks to the elimination of an entire program devoted to making that task easier. This indicates that the government is seriously out of touch with the concerns of working Albertans.

Environment and Sustainable Resource Development are crucial departments that need sustainable funding in order to fight climate change and protect air, land, water, and wildlife. Based on the budget for Sustainable Resource Development it seems clear

that this government has given up any plans to complete the South Saskatchewan regional plan by the end of this year.

You've done little to encourage diversification in our energy production. You can't sequester all the carbon Alberta emits. We need reductions in emissions. We can't even tell if we're making progress on the environmental protection front if we don't have properly funded, independent monitoring systems in place, which we don't, as well as the resources to identify violations and impose fines on those that violate our standards.

The lack of commitment to our environment has become an international embarrassment, risking the well-being of our primary industry and every Albertan. A clean environment is crucial to human health. This government clearly doesn't understand or believe that properly protecting the environment would help us protect long-term business sustainability as well as public health. This is a vital investment.

Perhaps the most troubling cut is the one to Housing and Urban Affairs. Just when homeless numbers were starting to improve a little, you slashed program spending in this vital area by \$90 million. When combined with last year's cuts, this department has seen a 36 per cent decrease in funding, or \$210 million, in just two years. This government has a stated policy of ending homelessness in 10 years, and that target can't possibly be met with these kinds of cuts.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this government shows its true colours when it comes to raising revenues through user fees. I have no problem with people paying for discretionary services they receive, but massive increases in registry fees are nothing more than a \$157 million tax grab, one that affects every Albertan. These increases, some of them over 150 per cent over last year, will have a serious impact on the working poor and the middle class, yet this government chooses to transform what should have been a one-time subsidy, the drilling stimulus, into a permanent feature of the royalty framework, robbing Albertans of hundreds of millions of dollars in royalties. Last year ending March 31, at a time of high oil prices and record profits, this government gave back to the industry \$1.7 billion, double what the government was anticipated to pay out. This contrast in priorities surely reveals the character of this government. I have met oil executives who are embarrassed by this government's lack of responsible leadership.

There's a right and a wrong in this world, Mr. Speaker, and the distinction is not very difficult to make. Responsible leaders must not ignore the moral dimensions of the budgets they create. The moral choices of this government will create hardship for many of our most vulnerable citizens, including children, 70,000 of whom are at risk for malnutrition, poor school achievement, and other preventable problems. Failing these children and other vulnerable Albertans will have a tremendous negative impact on our province and its people if we don't start planning for the future immediately.

Albertans shouldn't have to choose between Tory incompetence and extremist positions of the parties at the fringes of the political spectrum. In fact, we don't have to choose between the Tories, who cut the wrong things; the New Democrats, who'd cut nothing; and the Wildrose Alliance, who would cut everything. There's another choice: the Alberta Liberals, the only party with common-sense solutions that work for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, are you on 29(2)(a)?

**Ms Notley:** Yes. Under 29(2)(a) I'm wondering if the Leader of the Official Opposition could comment on a recent report released by the parliamentary financial officer, who actually identified the fact that over the last 25 years the governments across the country that were most likely to balance their budgets were New Democrat governments as opposed to Conservative governments, that were quite close after that, and Liberal governments, that were the farthest behind in terms of balancing their budgets.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of that study, but I'd be very interested to receive it under advisement. I'm sure there are important lessons to be learned from those that have gone before us.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Anderson:** Yes. To the hon. leader: I don't understand why you would feel the need to say that the Wildrose would cut everything. Clearly, you've read in our budget document – I hope you have – that we're proposing \$4.2 billion in infrastructure. We're proposing close to a \$40 billion budget. In fact, if you look at your proposal, your prebudget submission, you talk about stretching the capital budget from three years to five years, which would mean steeper infrastructure cuts than what we're proposing, from three years to four years. So I don't understand why the brazen attack.

**The Speaker:** Hon. leader, if you wish.

**Dr. Swann:** Fair comment, Mr. Speaker. I take that under advisement.

**The Speaker:** Others? The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a small point in the preliminary. If I heard the hon. member properly, I believe that there was a reference to four deficits that were budgeted for. In actual fact, I believe that that would have been two.

**The Speaker:** Hon. leader, if you wish. No? Okay.  
Others? The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Liepert:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Since we are both MLAs for the city of Calgary, I'd be very interested to know, in that billion and a half that the member suggested in savings such as cutting back in infrastructure, which Calgary projects would you like to go on the record, sir, that we do not proceed with in construction this year?

**The Speaker:** Hon. leader, if you wish.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of issues relating to infrastructure that I think one needs to look at carefully. We have a responsibility to the people of Alberta to manage the public purse in the same way that we would manage our own personal finances. If we have to delay a road's completion for a year, if we have to make some tough decisions to get back into the black, I think Albertans expect us to do that, just as we would in our own family budgeting.

Quite apart from that, this bloated government continues to persist in expanding itself, now to the tune of 24 ministries, when just in the year that I entered this Legislature, we were at 17 or 16 departments. One has to ask which part of small government or efficient government this leadership doesn't get. Why are we spending 40 million extra dollars on this and now an expanded

MLA representation. Where that came from, again, is another question that begs belief when Albertans want to see their wealth, their hard-earned cash, spent responsibly, frugally to address the core human service issues that protect Albertans, that protect our environment, and give us a long-term advantage for the future.

What we have seen is, unfortunately, cronyism, appointments of Tories to various boards and commissions. We've seen money going through the hands of this government at a rate unseen in the past, that retains the power and the privilege of this elite Tory . . . [interjections] Thirty-nine years is too long, Mr. Speaker, and it's time . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader has the floor.

**Dr. Swann:** It's long past due time for change, Mr. Speaker. They're past their best-before date, and I think Albertans are beginning to realize that.

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

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very interested to see that the member talks about . . .

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, I thought it was back and forth between the opposition and government.

**The Speaker:** There's no back and forth under 29(2)(a). He had my attention first, okay?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, the member has talked about a delay in capital construction. There are two major projects in Calgary that are under way in capital construction. One is the west LRT. The other is the south Calgary hospital. Tell us specifically. Don't ramble on about all of these generalities. Be specific.

**The Speaker:** Sorry. We've now finished our time.

Now, hon. Member for St. Albert, did you want to participate in this debate? Okay.

Then the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the motion at hand.

**Mr. Anderson:** On the motion. Boy, oh boy, Minister of Energy.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to this government's proposed budget. When the Alberta Liberals accuse the government of treating the public purse like their own limitless supply of Monopoly money and the NDP start banging the drum for more responsible fiscal management, you know there's a really, really big problem over there.

Budget 2011 is the latest in a string of damaging fiscal decisions made by a big-spending Progressive Conservative Party, that has lost any remaining right, if it had any, to call itself fiscally conservative. The numbers are painful: a \$3.4 billion deficit, three times higher than what they predicted it would be last year, an additional \$2.7 billion, to be spent on provincial capital projects, that isn't even included in the government's final deficit number, bringing the total cash shortfall to an astronomical \$6.1 billion, exceeded only by last year's record \$7.8 billion cash shortfall.

This \$6.1 billion shortfall will be paid for out of our savings fund, the sustainability fund. That savings fund was at \$15 billion just last year. By the end of this year it will be a paltry \$5 billion and only a year or two away from total annihilation. Our heritage fund, when adjusted for inflation, is now worth as much as it was in 1981, and the PC plan for balancing the budget is based on the hope that all-time record-high resource and income tax revenues are just around the corner. They also hiked user fees for vehicle registrations by 20 per cent and for registering a new business by

150 per cent. For a government whose flagship bill last year was designed to make Alberta more attractive for business, they just made it 150 per cent more expensive to start one. What a total embarrassment.

The bottom line is this. This government's spending addiction has squandered almost every cent saved over the last 15 years, has depleted our heritage fund to 1981 levels – 1981 levels – and the government's plan, so-called, to balance the budget consists of praying and hoping for \$140-a-barrel oil prices and the magic doubling or tripling of provincial GDP growth.

The irresponsibility of this budget is absolutely stunning. Less than 24 hours after this government delivered their budget, our caucus, the Wildrose, delivered ours, the balanced budget alternative document. In it we have outlined a plan to balance the budget this year without resorting to cuts to health, education, seniors' programs, or other vulnerable Albertans.

We propose balancing the budget through three primary means. First, we will limit the increase in spending for core social programs by the rate of inflation plus population growth, 2.2 per cent last year. This means a modest increase of a few hundred million for our health, education, social supports, seniors, child services, and other key social programs while freezing or moderately lowering less critical departmental budgets. This would save us \$900 million when compared to the continued unsustainable PC hikes to core program spending of 6 per cent in health care, 4.5 per cent in education. In a time of large deficits this is simply too much.

Second, we would spread the existing PC three-year capital plan over an extra year or an extra two years, like our friends the Liberals are calling for. Just an extra year. This would mean that infrastructure spending this year would total roughly \$4.2 billion, which is still slightly higher than the B.C., Ontario, Quebec average. I guess the President of the Treasury Board or perhaps the Energy minister would find our friends in Quebec, Ontario, and B.C. to be extreme fiscal conservatives. It just makes no sense that they would call us that.

We would propose focusing that \$4.2 billion on infrastructure to the most critical projects such as schools for Beaumont, Airdrie, Chestermere, Fort McMurray, continued work on the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads, and the doubling of highway 63 to Fort McMurray.

3:20

We would also invest millions into expanding long-term care facilities for seniors currently living in hospitals, thereby freeing up thousands of new acute-care beds in existing hospitals around the province. Doing so would allow us to postpone billions in spending on new acute-care facilities until we can actually find and pay for the health professionals needed to staff them.

Although protracting the PCs' existing capital spending plan is necessary to balance the budget this year, we would again note that the Alberta Liberal Party recommended a much more drastic approach in their 2011-12 prebudget recommendations by encouraging the government to stretch the existing three-year PC infrastructure budget over five years instead of the four we are proposing. Although such a commitment to fiscal prudence is laudable – and indeed such measures may one day be necessary should the PCs continue their reckless spending behaviour – the Wildrose feels this degree of delay in infrastructure investment to be unnecessarily drastic at this time and feels that stretching the PC's current three-year capital plan for a single additional year would deliver the savings necessary to balance the budget deficit in 2011.

I would ask the government this. If you claim our plan is extreme, do you feel the Liberals are right-wing nut jobs for proposing even steeper spending reductions? Or is it possible that

you have lost all sense of what it means to be fiscally conservative? Albertans clearly agree with the latter conclusion.

Finally, we would cut tens of millions of dollars to wasteful PC pet projects and vote-buying schemes such as the infamous \$2 billion carbon and capture waste boondoggle, \$115 million for new MLA offices, tens of millions in direct grants to corporations, and shrink the number of cabinet ministers from 24 to 16. These Wildrose proposals would result in a balanced budget for 2011 and put our province back on the road to financial health for both current and future generations.

The PC government continues to claim that if Albertans want to balance the budget before 2012, they must choose between either tax increases or deep spending cuts to core social programs as well as shelving priority infrastructure projects like schools and long-term care facilities. This claim by the government is a blatant falsehood. It is meant to generate fear and take advantage of Albertans' commitment to taking care of the vulnerable, ensuring quality, universal health care, giving our children the best education possible, and building key infrastructure. It is fearmongering, and it is blatantly dishonest.

Balancing the provincial budget does not require cuts to front-line health services, education, or funding for the vulnerable, but it does require a government that is able to prioritize needs before wants and that refrains from elaborate and expensive vote-buying schemes that do nothing to improve the lives of Albertans, only the fortunes of the PCs at the ballot box.

This government is gambling with all of our futures. Its balanced budget strategy consists of banking on Middle East turmoil to drive up energy prices. Do members in this House realize how lucky we are as a province? Alberta's resource royalties provide a revenue stream that no other province even comes close to enjoying. To put things in perspective, the Canadian provincial all-time record for resource revenues collected in a single year by a province other than Alberta was British Columbia's \$4.5 billion in 2005. Even during the low point of the 2008 recession Alberta's low end for resource revenues dropped to just under \$7 billion, off a high of \$14 billion – \$14 billion – three times the record of the next-closest province, in 2006.

This year resource revenues are projected to be a robust and healthy \$8.3 billion, not including land sales, yet despite this our province remains drowning in a sea of red ink. It is virtually unfathomable that we could have a \$6 billion cash shortfall under these circumstances, but here we sit. We cannot continue to rely on the good fortunes of high energy prices compensating for reckless and out-of-control spending habits. We live in a volatile world with uncertain economic times ahead. Technological advances and a shift away from carbon-intensive fuels will eventually result in lower energy prices and therefore lower resource revenues for the people of Alberta. As a province if we do not begin planning for this reality now, we run the risk of leaving our children with a legacy of structural debt, bankrupt social programs, higher taxes, and a dearth of economic opportunities.

And what of our savings? What will we pass on to our children and our grandchildren? Will they even know what it means to have the Alberta advantage? As a father of four this eats away at me every time I walk into this Chamber. Albertans have rallied behind the initiative to put away some money to offset temporary and unexpected declines in oil and gas revenues. This rainy-day sustainability fund totalled \$15 billion just last year. It is now projected to plunge to roughly \$5 billion this year, during a time when oil prices have never been consistently higher. When the sustainability fund runs dry, our province will be forced into choosing between cuts to core services, increased debt, higher taxes, or perhaps a combination of all three.

Albertans also supported the establishment of the Alberta heritage fund for the purpose of saving a percentage of our nonrenewable oil and gas revenues to ensure the Alberta advantage will remain for future generations, long after oil and gas become less important and therefore less valuable in the world's economy. This government has pillaged our children's savings repeatedly, to the point where the heritage fund is worth less today when adjusted for inflation than it was in 1981, 30 years ago. No growth. We have squandered every penny. This is a deplorable legacy to leave future Albertans given the unprecedented oil and gas boom of the last decade.

Furthermore, one failure that has gone largely unnoticed is the large amount of liabilities and debt entered into by the government over the past several years. The Alberta capital bonds sold in early 2010 are just one example. Recent borrowing for capital has returned us into debt to the tune of \$5.2 billion this year, and you can see this in the government's own 2011 fiscal plan document, page 79.

Even more significant are the unfunded pension liabilities, which have soared to over \$10 billion. The 2010 DBRS report puts our combined total of tax-supported debt and pension liabilities at an astounding \$27 billion, almost more than double what it was just a few years ago. With our sustainability fund approaching empty and the heritage fund losing value, our children and grandchildren will be left holding the bag unless we change the way we manage the finances of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask: what has happened to our province? Where has the commitment to our children's future gone? Will we leave them nothing? After all the oil and gas is gone or after its value declines, what legacy do we plan to leave them with?

The President of the Treasury Board said yesterday, answering a reporter's question, that the government wouldn't consider a provincial sales tax until our oil and gas ran out. He said: that would be a conversation for our kids to have. What a thing to say. Was not the whole dream of setting aside some of our nonrenewable resource wealth in the heritage fund so that our children wouldn't have to make the decision to hike taxes or slash social programs in the future? Wasn't that the whole Lougheed legacy, that our children and grandchildren could enjoy the same or an even better Alberta advantage than we had? I do not know the exact date that this government decided to throw that dream under the bus, but it is clear they have, and our kids and our grandkids are going to pay the price for it. They may have to raise taxes. They may have to go without core social programs that we have today because we've been irresponsible in this House.

Mr. Speaker, one of the ballot questions for the 2012 election is becoming clear. Can we as Albertans really afford four more years of this government's financial management? The sea of red ink flooding the Legislature at this time would suggest not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, you rose first.

**Mr. Taylor:** Actually, Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to this later, after 29(2)(a).

**The Speaker:** Okay. Edmonton-Riverview, under 29(2)(a)? Proceed.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. I listened with care to the speech from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, and several issues came to my mind. I won't point them all out or raise them all for discussion. I'm sure we could have a good discussion.

I noticed that the member talked about protecting spending on core programs, yet later in his speech he used the term “out-of-control spending.” When you really look at the numbers for spending on health or education or social services or housing, if you look at them from a lens that adjusts for inflation and population growth, they’re not out of control. It’s just a myth. In fact, by some measures our spending on health is really very low. As a percentage of our economy, for example, it’s running at 3 or 4 per cent in Alberta as opposed to, you know, 15 per cent or something in the States.

3:30

So I would really ask the member to choose his words carefully in the future because you can’t square that circle. If you’re not going to cut core funding, which you say you’re not, and you’re not going to raise taxes, then I don’t see how you’re going to balance the budget.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, if you wish.

**Mr. Anderson:** I’m glad to have the opportunity to clarify that. This is how you do it. Our budget proposes a 2.2 per cent increase in operational health spending. That’s roughly \$340 million. It’s a lot of money. It’s nothing to slouch at, that’s for sure. We think we need to do that, and if we can hopefully focus that on more procedures and on getting more procedures done than we did last year, that would be, of course, the best way to spend that money. So we’re not proposing to cut the health budget. We are proposing to increase it slightly, in control, at a rate that is sustainable over the long term. However, where we do make most of the savings, actually, is by extending the capital plan from three to four years.

Now, some of that would include health capital, and I’m glad you brought that up because I’d like to touch on that. One of the problems that we have in our system right now is that we are spending literally billions of dollars on infrastructure, specifically health infrastructure under the leadership of this health minister and previous health ministers, building buildings that we have absolutely no staff to put in. If you look at, for example, the south Calgary hospital, that’s a huge amount of new acute-care capacity as well as other capacity that is being built there, that will be done in the next couple of years. When that’s done, AHS doesn’t even have in their documents the budget to staff that hospital.

What’s going to happen is the same thing that happened at the McCaig Tower when that was opened. You open up this brand new, shiny facility, and I forget the exact number of operating rooms that are in the McCaig at this time – I don’t have that number in front of me – but they opened up a whole two operating rooms in the McCaig Tower. Two. This is during a time when we have physicians coming to our caucus all the time – and I’m sure the Liberals are the same and have physicians probably coming to them all the time – saying: we can’t even get operating time right now. Yet we opened up two operating rooms in the McCaig Tower out of however much potential capacity is there.

The problem is that there’s no budget. They keep building all this acute-care infrastructure, and there’s no budget to staff it. Not only that, what they should be doing, hon. member, is focusing their resources and their capital budget on long-term care. If they focused it on long-term seniors’ care and moved some of these seniors who are living in hospitals when they should be living in assisted living or long-term care out of the hospitals and into long-term care, they would open up hundreds or even thousands of acute-care beds across the province. That would solve a lot of our budget issues without having to spend gargantuan amounts of

infrastructure on new acute-care facilities that we can’t even afford to staff.

That’s one way that we can actually do more with less, and that’s what is so dumbfounding, let’s say, about the way this government has handled our health care system up until this point.

Thanks for the question.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise and respond to Budget 2011 today. There are so many things that could be said and so many places where one could start. I’ll just pick one and start anywhere.

We have here essentially about a \$40 billion budget. Rounding it up, we’re pretty close to \$40 billion. I think sometimes the sheer size of that number gets us all a little twitchy and gets us all a little overreactive, perhaps, and gets us to say either that happy days are here again and everything is wonderful or that the sky is falling, depending on which side of the House we sit on. I think the truth is neither of the above. I think that, in fact, we’re slowly coming out of this recession and steadily coming out of this recession. I think there are some pressure points and some cautions and some threat points in the world economy, no question about that. There are ways that things could go sideways on us, but the chances are pretty good that the recovery is going to continue slowly and steadily. This is a budget that the hon. minister of finance and President of Treasury Board brought down last week that pretty much stays the course of the last several budgets that we’ve seen here.

I guess that’s where I come from on this, Mr. Speaker. This budget isn’t all that bad. It’s not all that good either. It’s just kind of is more of the same. It’s pretty uninspiring. It’s a stay-the-course budget produced by a government that looks to me like it’s not very good at setting priorities or articulating which course they’re actually trying to follow. We’re spending nearly \$40 billion this year, yet we have no significant vision as a province for what it is that we hope to accomplish. But we’ll keep the lights on for the next year while making some modest improvements along a couple of the margins. There’s no question about that. When you’re dealing with \$40 billion – I’ll use the big number here for a second – one thinks you ought to be able to accomplish a little bit more than that with a little bit of vision and a little bit of ability to set priorities.

On the other hand, \$40 billion in a budget for a province of nearly 4 million people is just a very large version of any budget, Mr. Speaker, of the budget that you would do with your family or I would do with my family. This is where, I guess, we think that this whole either/or argument – you either have to cut spending or you have to raise taxes or you have to do this or you have to do that – is a little bit off because in the real world people don’t just deal with either/or. They have to deal with both/and.

You have to meet the monthly obligations out of whatever it is your employer is paying you. You have to pay down your mortgage or whatever debt you have, and you have to do it slowly, steadily, sustainably because you probably don’t have a great schwack of cash sitting in your mattress somewhere with which to pay off the mortgage in one lump sum. You have to start setting some money aside in an emergency fund in case the furnace goes on the fritz on a day like today. You have to start setting some money aside and start investing it, modestly at first but with a progressive plan to invest more and invest it across a wider portfolio, perhaps, as you accumulate more so that you’re saving for your kids’ university or college education, you’re saving for your own retirement, that sort of thing. You have to have some goals.

Mr. Speaker, the thing is that you have to do all of those things at the same time. That's what I think is missing from this debate and, frankly, from most of the other six budget debates that I've had the honour of taking part in during my time as an elected representative in this Assembly. We don't wrestle with the both/and.

Lest I sound a little bit like I'm contradicting myself since I did say earlier that there doesn't seem to be much ability to set some priorities here, let me get back to that point. At no time is it more important to set priorities than when you've got to do a budget that requires you to do all these things simultaneously. You have to decide what the most important things are that you need to do this year with the money you have, and then you have to look at everything else that falls below that line and say: "Okay. What can we give up because, you know, we don't have enough to do it all?" It doesn't necessarily mean that your own household budget has to balance every single year, year in and year out, but you've got to know what kind of debt you're carrying, and you've got to have a plan for how you're going to get rid of that debt over time. There's no question about that.

3:40

Any financial planner will tell you that you have to start by paying yourself first. If you don't start by paying yourself first, you're never really going to get ahead of the game. That's where we are in the province of Alberta right now: at a point where we're not getting ahead of the game, at a point where, as the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere pointed out, although perhaps a little dramatically, we're gambling on turmoil in the Middle East to produce a high enough price for a barrel of oil to somehow bring us back to prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, we have a nearly \$40 billion budget this year, and we have, if nothing else, \$240 million in in-year savings that the minister of finance has identified. If nothing else, we should be taking that quarter of a billion dollars – let's find another \$10 million somewhere and round it up – and doing something with that money to save it and invest it for the short term and the long term.

Our sustainability fund was conceived and was created and was contributed to specifically so that when the economy hit the skids, like it did a couple of years ago, we would have money to get us through these rough times. Congratulations to the government for using that money for the purpose for which it was intended. But the problem I have with the budget, Mr. Speaker, is that there is no clear plan yet to start putting money back into the sustainability fund, to say nothing of the fact that we're not investing for the long term on any kind of predictable, sustainable, regular basis by making contributions to the heritage fund.

I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that we have to start saving some money again. Long-term planning is generational and so are two of its key components: saving and investing for the future. Alberta's resource revenues are our inheritance, and it's time that we stop spending it all. We think it should work something like this, maybe not exactly but something like this: one-third into savings, one-third into long-term capital investments and long-term program investments, and only one-third of it spent on the province's day-to-day expenses. Over time the income produced by your growing savings, your growing heritage fund or any other endowment fund that you have, will begin to replace the need to spend that last third, and we'll be able to save and invest it all. That's the thing that's going to get us off this boom-and-bust roller coaster. That's the only thing that's going to get us off this boom-and-bust roller coaster.

Mr. Speaker, once we're off that coaster ride, then we get to dream really big. In fact, we can start dreaming right now if you wish. It could be the best health care system – public or private or

hybrid – in the world. It could be a high-speed rail link between Calgary, Edmonton, up to Fort McMurray, down to Lethbridge. It could be anything we want to dream. But in order to make the dream a reality, we've got to develop the savings habit in this province.

We are extremely fortunate, Mr. Speaker, to have all these fossil fuels under our feet and the ability to get them out of the ground, maybe not as cleanly as we should and as we need to develop. That might be a dream in and of itself, producing clean oil, because there is no such thing as clean oil today. There's only oil that's slightly less dirty than other oil. So maybe that's the dream – I don't know – but we're very fortunate to have that natural resource. It puts us in an enviable position relative to every other province in this country, relative to most jurisdictions around the world. But we're not going to be able to take advantage of it if we don't get ourselves into the savings and investment habit.

That's job one. It's not the only job that we can do. We must do a number of others. We have to meet our monthly obligations. We have to have a plan to pay down our debt, manage our debt. We've got to do all these things. But job one, the most important priority of all and the thing that, as I look, is absolutely missing from the budget is developing a savings habit and a savings strategy and a savings plan that starts now.

You know, financial planners say that you can start with \$25 a week or even \$25 a month. We have the ability to do somewhat more than that, maybe not a lot relative to what we actually need to spend over the course of this year, but we should start saving some of it. We must start saving some of it. We must get into that habit, or we're just not going to get ahead of ourselves ever.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Well, hon. members, I have no additional speakers on my list. Does that mean I should call this to a vote?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Call the vote. Go ahead.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was attempting to catch your attention for a moment there, and I got sidetracked.

**The Speaker:** You have my attention now. Did you want to participate?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** I will participate in the debate if there are no others that wish to.

**The Speaker:** Proceed. I just about called the question, you know.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very motivated to speak to this whole budget debate. What motivates me, really, is the commitment in this budget to health care in particular, which happens to be my portfolio. While I fully recognize that we will be having a set-aside date and time to address specific health care issues, I am motivated to stand up right now and make a few general comments in lead-up to the estimates debate, which will occur in a few weeks.

For example, I'd like it to be made abundantly clear to all members and to Albertans listening or watching that the reason we're bringing forward this health budget, with the 6 per cent assured increase for Alberta Health Services, is so that important programs

that are there, that are part of the five-year health action plan, can continue as planned last year. Mr. Speaker, this document, that I think almost everybody here now has received, is called *Becoming the Best: Alberta's 5-Year Health Action Plan*. This is the most significant document, with the largest amount of planning, the longest range planning ever in the history of our province and, I would tell you, in the history of all of Canada.

What happens here, though, is that some people get the wrong impression of it. They seem to think on the one hand that we're tipping the jar of money over, and on the other hand they're saying that we're keeping the lid on it too tightly. You've heard some of that in the comments made by previous speakers. I want to make it very clear that the difference between this health action plan, which is, as I say, the most ambitious and the most aggressive plan in Canada for health, and whatever previous plans might have been around is that there is predictability and stability here that has never before been experienced.

What it means to us, financially speaking, such as the budget would indicate, is that we will have about a \$545 million increase in the Alberta Health Services side of the budget. That specifically means that acute care will be beefed up. We'll be hiring more staff. We're hoping to attract more doctors. In fact, we've got some good news coming forward very soon in that respect with regard to some rural settings. We know that we'll be beefing up the number of beds in hospitals, Mr. Speaker. We've already committed to 360 in-hospital beds being opened up and available before the end of March of this year. In fact, we've already got 240 or so of them opened, and the remainder will open over the next few weeks. We need to continue keeping pace with an aging population and a growing population. That population will need more of these kinds of services.

Secondly, with respect to continuing care there is a commitment in this budget to making good on our plans to ensure that at least a thousand new continuing care spaces are made available in our province over each of the next four years. The first year will come to a conclusion here in about four weeks' time, and you will see approximately 1,300 new spaces being opened up and available in the continuing care spectrum.

Mr. Speaker, those two issues alone aren't the reason why we're starting to see some good news in emergency departments, but they are absolutely critical. That represents a significant portion of our budget.

Secondly, is the whole area of public and community health. These are important programs for us with respect to the PCNs, the primary care networks. Everybody here would know that we have about 38 of them. As a result of that, we're now seeing more Albertans enfranchised with a doctor of their own choosing. We're seeing a professional, team-based approach occurring in each one of those primary care networks, and we're funding them appropriately to ensure that the services are delivered on a timely basis in the areas and communities where they are needed.

Similarly with cancer treatment, Mr. Speaker. We're seeing a tremendous influx of people to our province from elsewhere who are seeking cancer treatment. I wish I'd had time this afternoon in question period to elaborate somewhat on the answer to the question that was posed by one of the members from the opposition regarding cancer care because I can tell you that we are seeing some tremendous improvements in cancer care in our province.

**3:50**

Not to forget, of course, what's going forward here in the budget we're debating with respect to health care infrastructure. We just committed over \$200 million more to help expand and improve and consolidate services related to the Tom Baker cancer

centre in Calgary. Similarly, we're doing about \$67 million of that portion here in Edmonton at the Cross Cancer Institute.

You know, Mr. Speaker, as early as this morning I had an e-mail from someone who was saying what wonderful care he had at the Cross Cancer Institute, and he had one observation he wanted to make. He said: in spite of the phenomenally good care that I received and the speed with which I received it at the Cross Cancer Institute, I couldn't help but notice in the parkade the number of licence plates that were not from Alberta.

Now, I'm not criticizing that at all because we do have the Canada Health Act. We have our own Alberta Health Act, which was just passed last fall. It commits us to the principles of the Canada Health Act, and one of the central features of that Health Act, of course, is portability. So we have people from other provinces who are coming here for our health services, and we're proud to provide them. But let's not ever lose sight of the fact that as a result there are going to be some wait times for Albertans. It's just how the Canada Health Act works in this particular case. We have reciprocal-type agreements, as you know, Mr. Speaker. So that's another important care.

I want to turn my attention briefly, if I could, to another very important aspect of continuing care, and that's home care. Mr. Speaker, we have 107,000 Albertans today who are receiving excellent home-care services right in the places they reside. That's as a result of a 7 per cent increase to that part of Alberta Health Services' budget. That means that there's about \$407 million going into home care. Why is that important? Because that is one of the most important aspects of not only providing outstanding care for Albertans to help them cope with whatever chronic problem they might have, but it also has a tremendous impact on reducing the numbers in our emergency rooms, which have been the subject of much debate over many, many years and not just in Alberta; this is a debate around the world. We have to keep that in mind.

I have to tell you that as a result of outstanding services not only in the hospitals but also in the home-care area our province has the lowest readmission rates anywhere in Canada. Right here in Alberta. This is phenomenally good news for us. We're very proud of that, and this budget will allow us to continue that excellent service and even to add probably another 3,000 or 4,000 people to the list.

I know that this year is unique in that our first crop, if I can call them that, of baby boomers is turning 65. They're not all going to need home-care services tomorrow, but the numbers would tell you that many folks in the coming years will need that. So we have to be prepared, and this budget sets the way for that.

The other part of Alberta Health Services' budget which is of great significance is the huge amount of work they do with transplants, with cardiac surgery, with renal dialysis, and all the other things that unless you really needed it, you wouldn't really know about it. We have truly outstanding services being provided in our top-drawer facilities. These are facilities that are heralded around the world. This budget will allow us to continue, maintain, and even augment those outstanding services.

Let me give you a couple of examples which I wanted to mention today in question period, but 30 seconds is just not enough time to get so much of this good news out. Here is another reason why we should be supporting this budget: the Stollery children's hospital in Edmonton. We have that site named as the principal North American centre for what's called the Berlin Heart. Mr. Speaker, the Berlin Heart is the leading artificial heart technology in the world – in the whole world – and we have that right here at the Stollery children's centre. What an incredible service to provide not only for children but for the researchers, for the physicians, for the administrators, and others who are magnetized



by that particular fact alone. We are attracting, we are recruiting, and we are retaining the world's best right here in Edmonton, and this budget will help us to continue in that vein.

Similarly, I mentioned the lowest readmission rates in the country, and that includes two very specific procedures that are nationally reported on a regular basis. One of them is hysterectomies and the other is prostatectomies. Having the lowest admission rates in those categories is hugely significant, but again, if you haven't experienced it or you don't know someone who has, you wouldn't know about it. So I think it's incumbent to make a few of these comments.

I want to comment very briefly also on a couple of other quick facts here and the relevance to our budget and why we should be supporting it. You know, Alberta scientists have invented a technology to improve the lives of people with stroke and spinal cord injury. In fact, what they've invented is a revolutionary new system that improves the quality of life for people paralyzed by a stroke or spinal cord injury. This was led, of course, by Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research scientist Arthur Prochazka, PhD, University of Alberta. They have a team that designed a system known as ReJoyce, and they've completed a successful clinical trial with participants from across western Canada. Now, here's the beauty of this, Mr. Speaker. The ReJoyce, which is the rehabilitation joystick for computerized exercise system, is a spring-loaded arm with special handles and attachments that the user twists, squeezes, and moves around to play custom-made computer games, if necessary, or computerized functions. It's an amazing invention from right here in Alberta.

We know that our team of neurologists have done a 10-year study, and they've found relationships between HIV and the causes of brain disease, as published in a prestigious international journal. It was published back on September 28 in the international journal of neurology. I could go on with all of these good-news things, Mr. Speaker, but suffice it to say that when we said that under this Premier we would bring in a revolutionary new approach to not only funding health care but to delivering on the specific improvements that would increase access and reduce wait times, we meant it, and now you see proof of that.

This document, that I referred to earlier, has a number of key strategies. All of them are incredibly important to be supported by this budget. In fact, one of them has to do with providing more choices for continuing care, and continuing care choices mean aging in place. A lot of people don't understand what this means. In this House I've sat and I've listened carefully to attacks against our government: "There's not enough long-term care. You guys aren't doing enough to help the frail, the elderly, the infirmed, and so on." You know, that is absolutely not true. We have said that we would keep at least 14,500 long-term care spaces as they are, and even then we're augmenting that in some cases because some of the DAL or SL facilities do have a component for long-term care built into them. The Extendicare Michener in Red Deer is one such example. We've actually increased the number of long-term care spaces there when some of the people were transferred from one area of Valley Park Manor and one area of Red Deer Lodge over there. So we have these kinds of choices now.

I'll just close with this, Mr. Speaker. What has to be understood is that what we're seeing now through the ministry of seniors and perhaps in a couple of other ministries is a synergistic approach that allows for new types of facilities to be built wherein people who require supportive living or designated assisted living, or perhaps it's long-term care type living, are going to have the level of service they need rise up to their expectations so that they don't have to move to a different facility to get it. It's very simply called

aging in place, and that is a fundamental part of this whole budget as well.

I know there are probably other speakers who wish to address the budget and the throne speech and a number of other issues that are before us, but on that note, I would like to move that we adjourn debate at this time.

**The Speaker:** I will not call that question until we deal, first of all, with Standing Order 29(2)(a). There are five minutes available if there are questions. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Mr. Speaker, that's an interesting discussion by the minister, and I have some comments for the minister that I'd like to get further explanation for, that he didn't deal with in his topic. As you know, Mr. Minister, in rural Alberta there's been an issue with rural retention of our doctors and recruitment. I sent you a note just recently from Dr. De Jongh, the president of the primary care network in the McLeod River area out of Whitecourt. The issue of retention of our doctors and recruiting doctors in rural Alberta: you seem to have left that out of your discussion. I know it's in the five-year plan. I know we're well funded. Can you give us some comments on that?

4:00

**Mr. Zwodzdesky:** Thank you. Hon. member, I'd be very happy to do that. This is an issue near and dear to my heart as well. As most people here would know, I grew up in rural Alberta. I'm very proud of that. I get it, as they say. I understand what some of the challenges are. I have visited numerous hospitals across the entire spectrum, including High Prairie, Slave Lake, Wabasca, Whitecourt, Mayerthorpe, and elsewhere.

Nonetheless, the fact is that we do have a number of incentive programs out there, Mr. Speaker, primarily under RPAP, which is the rural physician action plan. Now, that's just one example of a number of programs that we have to help recruit and retain doctors. There are issues in RPAP and in other parts of our incentive program wherein we actually physically pay doctors to help them set up their offices. I think it's a grant of about \$10,000. It's a magnet. It's only one of many.

On the other side, we have a deal now with the University of Alberta and, I believe, if I'm not mistaken, also with the University of Calgary wherein second-year and third-year students are automatically encouraged to go to rural Alberta, spend time there as part of their training piece. You know, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing some good results from that because they are starting to get a real affinity for rural life. It's a great life, and rural communities here present it very, very well.

In total, Mr. Speaker, we have about 7,697 fully registered physicians in Alberta. That, hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, is up from 7,477 in 2009. That's a difference of about 220 more, or an increase of about 3 per cent, over where we were at. That's very good news.

With respect to other incentives we also have a number of benefits that are provided to our doctors. There are benefits for retention. There is what I'll call a bonus – you have to apply for it if you're a doctor – that is paid to doctors for keeping their practices going in Alberta. I think it's about \$10,000 or \$11,000 a year for those who apply for it. There are other benefits there, too.

We have an education component wherein we help doctors with education upgrading costs or training upgrading costs. We have programs that deal with parental leave or maternity leave specifically. We have programs that help support doctors with stress or bereavement issues. There are a number of these programs.

The physician office supply program is another one that we have, where we help them with upgrading their computers. As you

know, we're heading faster than ever toward a paperless office situation around the world, and health care is no exception, Mr. Speaker. What it basically means is that we're trying to get electronic medical records interfacing with electronic health records so that when you or I or any Albertan shows up in a hospital with an emergency, they have information at their fingertips. That's another important program.

When you put all of that together, it is tens of millions of dollars. It probably amounts to about \$200 million all in. I'm going a little bit by memory here, obviously.

Hon. member, please know that I am very committed to helping wherever I can to assist with the recruitment of more doctors and the retention of those that we have so that we can help deliver on the five-year health action plan goals and strategies that I alluded to a little bit earlier.

I understand someone else has a question, so I'll take my seat.

**The Speaker:** Well, there are 14 seconds left, so whoever wants to have a question, go for it.

All right. We've got an adjournment motion before us.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 1

#### Asia Advisory Council Act

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on behalf of the hon. Premier.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very privileged to rise for second reading of Bill 1. I so move the Asia Advisory Council Act, 2011.

At the heart of Bill 1 is the need for Alberta to secure its prosperity and quality of life for the 21st century. For a long time we've relied heavily on the U.S. to buy our products and invest in our province, but the world is changing and so is the world economic order. By passing the Asia Advisory Council Act, you'll be supporting Alberta's efforts to change with it.

We need to pursue new and bigger markets, and that means setting our sights on Asia, a market of billions that holds enormous potential for our province. We have a need to diversify. Alberta has long been Canada's economic engine. The strength of our economy positioned us to weather the storms that came with the financial crisis in 2008 and subsequent global recession. As the world recovers, Alberta continues to be on a track to move forward, to continue to lead the nation in prosperity, and to expand our presence as a player on the global stage.

Like other places Alberta felt the impacts of the recession, but not only did we survive it; we learned from it. What we learned was this: don't put all your eggs in one basket. America has long been Canada's strongest trading partner, and as a destination for 85 per cent of Alberta's exports in many ways it's also long been our basket.

Things have changed. With a national debt last month of more than \$14 trillion America is not as reliable as it once was as a destination for our exports. For Americans the road to good economic health is going to be a long and winding one. There is no doubt the U.S. will rally and come back, but it may take years. All of this sends a strong message to Alberta. Our road to success in the markets lies in diversifying our products and our exports.

Market diversity is one of the main goals of Bill 1, the Asia Advisory Council Act. If passed, the Asia Advisory Council Act

would establish a council of 10 members who represent a cross-section of organizations and interests, including the business, cultural, and academic communities. The members of the council would have the perspective and expertise to advise the government on ways to advance Alberta's business and cultural interests in Asia.

Asia is an immense market of 4 billion people. It has a growing middle class and a growing demand for Alberta's products. The region is Alberta's second-largest export market, worth over \$6.5 billion in 2009. Opportunities for Albertans and Alberta are tremendous and within our reach by strengthening our ties with markets in China, India, Japan, and Korea. We've long understood the advantages of gaining better access to the region, and strengthening our ties is part of our day-to-day business.

One of Alberta's earliest connections to Asia was our twinning with Heilongjiang in China. The twinning has led to growing economic, scientific, and cultural ties. We're celebrating the 30th anniversary of this twinning this year.

As well as in China Alberta has international offices in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea. These offices play a key role in building and maintaining relations with our Asia partners.

In these past few months our Alberta-Japan office hosted a carbon capture and storage and green technology seminar. Held just last month, the seminar focused on our investment here on initiatives and climate change policy for 30 senior executives from Japan's energy sector.

With the support of the Alberta-Korea office the Calgary Airport Authority established Korean Air's direct service flight into Calgary last summer. This expanded air service is essential to increasing tourism, investment, and attracting international students from Korea to Alberta.

Last May Premier Stelmach joined the Premiers of B.C. and Saskatchewan on a mission to China.

**The Speaker:** Uh-uh.

**Ms Evans:** Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. Our Premier joined the Premiers of B.C. and Saskatchewan on a mission to China and Japan. On that trip they opened up a joint trade and investment office in Shanghai.

In November the Premier led a mission to India, where he met business and government leaders to cultivate new business relationships and strengthen current ties. Thanks to the involvement of members of this House, Mr. Speaker, I'm convinced that this visit acknowledged for the Premier the very great importance of expanding our relationships with India.

**4:10**

Last month, when I visited Thailand on the heels of an investment by their national company in energy of over \$2 billion, we noted even greater interest in Alberta as a responsible energy partner for future development by the people of Thailand. They were excited, to say the least, about the opportunities they perceive in Alberta.

Our work is continuing to pay off. Over the past two years Asian investment in Alberta has neared \$20 billion. This includes PetroChina's \$5.4 billion investment in EnCana natural gas ventures and \$1.9 billion for a 60 per cent share in two Athabasca oil sands projects; Sinopec's \$4.65 billion stake in Syncrude; China Investment Corporation's of \$1.25 billion into Penn West Energy; Korea National Oil Corporation's investment of \$4.1 billion to buy Harvest energy; and, as I mentioned previously, the Thailand investment purchasing 40 per cent of Statoil projects in Alberta.

We certainly welcome the interest in investment in our oil sands, but we know our economic future lies in the diversification of our economy. We're seeing a growing number of Canadian and Alberta-based companies make inroads in Asia. For example, in the legal sector Bennett Jones, a law firm with roots in Calgary and in Edmonton, and Blakes, a firm with an office in Calgary, have both established offices in Beijing. Most recently Gowlings has become the first Canadian law firm to sign a bilateral co-operative agreement with the China Council for Promotion of International Trade.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There was more good news last month when the Bank of China announced it will open an office in Calgary, its third Canadian location. This was a very positive announcement. Financial institutions go where their customers go, and the Bank of China is seeing their customers come here. In terms of growing market opportunities this signals broader investments to come.

We're also forging important ties in academia. The universities of Alberta and Calgary, Grant MacEwan University, NAIT, SAIT: all of them have relationships with educational institutes that allow them to tap into the best and brightest of minds. For example, the Prince Takamado Japan Centre for Teaching and Research at the University of Alberta brings together universities from Japan and Canada to promote the exchange of undergrad and grad students. The Confucius Institute in Edmonton is a government of China sponsored centre that works in partnership with the Edmonton public school board. The institute promotes Mandarin and Chinese culture and provides Chinese-language services to the public schools.

Mr. Speaker, establishing the Asia advisory council would not only be our first step towards deepening our ties with the entire region; it would be a very important step. We need to shape a 21st century vision for Alberta-Asia relations. Once Bill 1 is passed, we hope to see the best and brightest minds sit on the council. The people on this council will be experts on Asia. We'll be looking for members from the business sector who have expertise in Asian markets. We'll be looking in academia and education and in arts and other sectors for similar experts. We want people with a keen understanding of the Asian market who are able and willing to provide Alberta with the knowledge, perspective, and sensitivities to expand our relationships in the region. We want the best because this council can play such an important role as we take a focused and deliberate approach to relationship building in Asia.

The deliberate approach has worked well for us in the past. Since early 2005 we have pursued a direct and active role in Canada-U.S. relations. Most notably, we established a policy-oriented office in Washington, DC. We put ourselves on the U.S. radar screen in the U.S. capital. In Canada we've been able to influence Canadian policy toward a more positive approach to the U.S. We know that as we look to new and bigger markets, the same approach will bring stronger relationships and opportunities with Asia.

With the creation of this council we'll open doors even wider for a bigger and brighter future for Alberta and Albertans. We look forward to more opportunities to expand our leading growth sectors like information and communication technology, nanotechnology, aerospace, and defence, green building products, and health and medical technology. We will continue to work towards advancing our ties with Asia in all of these industry sectors, and that means attracting not only investment from the region but the skilled and talented people who can bring their expertise to Alberta. Asian countries are Alberta's number one source for immigration. Continuing to attract people from the region to Alberta will strengthen our partnerships and benefit both Alberta and Asia.

We hope that you support this bill, that you will enable us to create a council of experts whose mandate is to identify and advise us of opportunities for co-operation with Asia, a council that will help us capitalize on the connections we've already made in business, education, research, and culture and, most importantly, will help us continue to forge new roads, new opportunities, and maintain a reputation as both an excellent destination for investment and a leading player on the global stage.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members to support this bill. With that, I would ask you to allow me to adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

## Bill 2 Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011

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

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to second reading of Bill 2, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011.

I want to thank the hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services and her department for their initiative in bringing forth this important piece of legislation and for allowing me the privilege of sponsoring the bill in the House.

Family violence has devastating consequences, Mr. Speaker, for many people in our province. One of our government's top priorities is to prevent and address family violence so that all Albertans feel safe in their homes and communities. This bill will enhance the safety of individuals and families affected by family violence through protection orders to protect those who have experienced family violence and to prevent further violence. Each year 1,700 applications for emergency protection orders are made in the province of Alberta, and 80 per cent of those are granted.

The proposed amendments reflect the advice received from key stakeholders on needed changes. Those stakeholders included the law enforcement communities and Crown prosecutors. The most significant changes brought about by these amendments would be to ensure that there is more consistent enforcement of protection orders and that breaches are met with sanctions which will send a strong message to perpetrators that breaches will not be tolerated.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the act does not provide any specific provisions for prosecuting breaches of protection orders. Presently the situation is that police and prosecutors have the option of prosecuting a breach of a protection order either as ordinary civil contempt of court or as a violation of section 127 of the Criminal Code of Canada, which is a general provision that creates an offence for breaching a court order. Since both of these provisions are applicable to a whole range of breaches of court orders, some of which are minor, some of which are very serious, and everything in between, the penalties that are meted out under each of those particular avenues of prosecution varied quite considerably. So this has led to some inconsistencies in the penalties which are applied for breaches of protection orders.

The amendment which is proposed in this bill will clearly spell out in the act that breaching a protection order is an offence, and it will carry specific penalties. Mr. Speaker, I believe that these measures will help to ensure consistent enforcement across the province. The department will continue to work closely with law enforcement and the legal community in the event that these amendments are passed, and they will be asked to provide input on any required changes.

**4:20**

The penalties proposed in these amendments, Mr. Speaker, were determined in discussions with Justice and Attorney General and a review of other domestic violence legislation across the country. The bill proposes fines up to \$5,000 or possible jail time of up to 30 days or both for a first offence, mandatory jail time ranging from a minimum of 14 days up to 18 months for a second offence, and a minimum of 30 days' incarceration and up to 24 months for third and subsequent offences. If passed, this legislation will send a very strong message that a breach of a protection order is a serious matter which will bear very significant consequences.

The remaining three amendments are housekeeping issues that will help clarify the processes and streamline administration of the act by the courts. The first will repeal a section that specifies the type of justice of the peace who has the authority to grant emergency protection orders. This will leave the assignment of a justice of the peace up to the discretion of the justice system, which will align the Protection Against Family Violence Act with changes to the Justice of the Peace Act.

Amendments to the Protection Against Family Violence Act will also clarify how evidence is presented and considered when emergency protection orders granted by the provincial court are later confirmed and possibly extended by the Court of Queen's Bench. Amendments will also clearly define the type of communication considered contact under a protection order. Protection orders may include provisions forbidding a perpetrator from contacting the abused person. The change will clarify that contact includes both direct and indirect communication. Including indirect communication will make it clear that a perpetrator cannot harass someone indirectly; for example, using a third party to contact an individual under a protection order.

Mr. Speaker, the measures in these amendments will not be a cure-all for family violence. Other measures such as women's shelters, safe visitation sites, early intervention and counselling, and addiction treatments are all being improved by the minister and her department, all with a view to breaking the cycle of family violence. However, these proposed amendments will improve our response to this issue, and they will provide some additional measure of increased protection for people affected by family violence.

I am therefore very pleased to move second reading of Bill 2, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2011.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would move adjournment of debate on the bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 3  
Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions  
Amendment Act, 2011**

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 3, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, before us today we have a series of relatively straightforward proposed legislative revisions that involve a number of required wording changes to the current Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act. Essentially, in this amendment act we're looking at consolidating the existing geological and geophysical classes of licensure in Alberta into a single class to be known as geoscience. This change is in keeping

with what's happening in the other jurisdictions across Canada with the exceptions of Prince Edward Island and the Yukon, which have not implemented similar legislation.

By passing this amendment act, we will be harmonizing our professional geoscience legislation with that of other jurisdictions and, in so doing, fostering labour mobility across our great country. Freedom of interprovincial movement of professionals is part of our obligation under the national agreement on internal trade and the New West Partnership trade agreement with Saskatchewan and British Columbia, Mr. Speaker.

Members of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, or APEGGA, the association that oversees these professions, voted in favour of these changes at their 2009 annual general meeting. I'd also like to point out that this amendment act would apply to approximately 5,400 individuals practising geology or geophysics in Alberta. That is roughly 10 per cent of APEGGA's current membership.

Consultations were conducted with a total of 34 professional and industry associations, postsecondary institutes, and government departments in the development of these changes. APEGGA specifically discussed these changes with the Alberta Institute of Agrologists, the Association of the Chemical Profession of Alberta, the Alberta Society of Professional Biologists, and the Alberta colleges of professional foresters and professional forest technologists since these organizations had raised a few questions when the changes were first proposed.

Mr. Speaker, these professional regulatory organizations met and subsequently agreed that the inclusion of earth sciences and the environment fits within the new definition of the practice of geoscience. They also recognize that all their members work in the broad field of earth sciences and the environment, and any future concerns regarding the potential overlap of these professional responsibilities could be dealt with at the organizational level.

Mr. Speaker, if these proposed amendments pass, we would be repealing the existing definitions of the practice of geology and geophysics and would replace them with a single new geoscience definition of practice. The term "geosciences" more accurately reflects the type of work and activities typically carried out by our geologists and geophysicists.

As proposed in this amendment act, the definition of geoscience will now include references to earth sciences, exploration, and environmental activities, as is the case in various ways in five other provinces, Mr. Speaker. This reflects the growing importance of environmental stewardship within the professional activities and accountabilities of geoscientists. It also serves to provide Alberta with one of the most comprehensive pieces of professional geoscience legislation in the country.

Through these proposed amendments geoscientists in Alberta will have one of the most encompassing scopes of practice in all of Canada. This proposed act will continue to ensure that these practitioners provide the highest standards of professional services.

Mr. Speaker, the protected titles for professional geoscientists in Alberta would change under these proposed amendments. The existing protected titles of professional geologists, or P.Geol., and professional geophysicists, or P.Geoph., would be replaced by the new title of professional geoscientist, or P.Geo. Individuals who hold the existing professional geologist or geophysicist designations would be allowed to keep their current titles if they prefer. However, should the Legislature approve these amendments, all newly registered members in these fields will be issued the professional geoscientist title.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of the consolidation of the terms "geology" and "geophysics" into the combined term "geoscience" a

number of consequential wording changes would be required throughout the existing Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act. The first of these is to rename the act itself. If passed, the act would become the engineering and geoscience professions act.

In a similar vein, Mr. Speaker, APEGGA's name would also be changed to the association of professional engineers and geoscientists of Alberta. The acronym will drop one G, but it would still be pronounced the same as before, so just APEGA with one G as opposed to the current two Gs. There are many other examples throughout the existing act that would need to change to reflect the consolidation of geology and geophysics into geoscience. I won't go through them all, Mr. Speaker, but suffice it to say that these are consequential wording changes that need to be made to ensure that the practice and definition of geoscience is consistently applied throughout the act.

4:30

One other change included in these proposed amendments is the creation of the position of chief executive officer within the APEGGA management structure. The new advocacy position is separate and distinct from the current registrar that is stated in the act. Members of APEGGA approved the new position at their 2010 annual general meeting, Mr. Speaker.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that this proposed legislation will ensure that Alberta remains a leader in the development of professional legislation that not only protects the public interest but also reflects the current scope of work done by geologists and geophysicists today.

These amendments, Mr. Speaker, have the full support of the Alberta government departments, many professional and industry organizations, the academic community, and Alberta's municipalities. They also fit squarely with the Alberta government's commitment to labour mobility in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to sponsor Bill 3, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2011, and I encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislature to support its passage.

I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

#### Bill 4

#### Securities Amendment Act, 2011

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

**Dr. Brown:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 4, the Securities Amendment Act, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, securities regulation is crucial to the smooth functioning of any capital market and especially here in Alberta, where it is extremely important to our economy. Canada's current securities regulatory system is rated as one of the best in the world by a number of independent think tanks from around the world, including the World Bank.

In the interest of maintaining a system that is working well, Alberta together with Quebec, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan is challenging the unprecedented attempt by the federal government to impose its control over this area of provincial jurisdiction. Alberta has made a strong case before the Alberta and Quebec courts of appeal, and the government will be presenting our case before the Supreme Court of Canada in April of this year.

Mr. Speaker, the government will continue to oppose this move by the federal government to create a single federal securities

regulator. There is no evidence to support the purported benefits of this nonexistent single federal regulator as the current system is working very well. All one has to do is look at how well Canada fared in light of the global economic crisis. The current system is a decentralized yet national system.

While the passport system is working very well, any securities regulatory system must constantly evolve, innovate, and reform to keep pace with changing market conditions. The Securities Amendment Act which we are bringing forth furthers the work that Alberta has done in modernizing, streamlining, and harmonizing securities legislation over the past six years under the auspices of the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation.

There are several amendments in this bill that provide clarification, but the majority are needed to keep Canada's current decentralized securities regulatory system harmonized. I'd like to touch on a couple of key amendments that add flexibility to the regulatory framework for credit rating organizations such as Moody's and Standard & Poor's.

Last year we created a harmonized statutory framework for regulating credit rating organizations to better protect investors across Canada. This was part of the world-wide response by securities regulators to the global financial crisis. The Alberta Securities Commission is seeking additional ways to allow it to respond more quickly to changing market conditions. Accordingly one of the amendments in this bill proposes that credit rating organizations be officially designated by the Alberta Securities Commission in order for its ratings to be used as official ratings under Alberta's securities laws. These amendments will allow the ASC to adjust the minimum rating investment requirements in appropriate situations like a global financial crisis. In other words, before any investment can be made, the security or whatever the investment is has to be graded at or above a certain level such as B or double-A, for example.

The recent global financial crisis demonstrates the integral role played by clearing agencies in maintaining the integrity of the Canadian financial system. The clearing agencies along with stock exchanges facilitate any trading in securities such as stocks, bonds, and futures. Clearing agencies complete transactions by ensuring that the seller gets paid and that the purchaser gets what was purchased. Currently there are three clearing agencies providing settlement and clearance services across Canada: the Canada Depository Services for Equity Securities, the Canadian Derivatives Clearing Corporation for exchange-traded derivatives, and the Calgary-based Natural Gas Exchange for energy, including natural gas, crude oil, and electricity contracts.

This legislation will require any clearing agency operating in Alberta to be recognized by the ASC, just like a stock exchange operating in Alberta must be recognized. This will mean a clearing agency must have rules in place to ensure that it operates in a fair and orderly manner for the protection of investors. Investor protection is what securities regulation is all about. These amendments streamline and harmonize our legislation so that it is up to date and address regulatory gaps in order to better protect investors.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot afford to wait for the final outcome of the provincial and federal references before updating our securities legislation. These amendments are needed now.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 4.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 5**  
**Notice to the Attorney General Act**

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 5, the Notice to the Attorney General Act.

Mr. Speaker, it is important for the Attorney General to receive notice about a variety of issues so that they are able to protect the interests of Albertans and are well prepared to defend the validity of Alberta's legislation. In addition, prompt and timely notice to the Attorney General will reduce delays and increase the efficiency of the court system.

For example, Bill 5 will clarify that there is a duty to provide notice of allegations of inadequate consultation with aboriginal peoples. The government has a legal duty to consult aboriginal peoples when there is a potential adverse impact on any aboriginal treaty or right. However, currently for someone alleging before a court or tribunal that the government has not met this duty to consult, there is no requirement that the person notify the Attorney General. Under Bill 5 it will be clear that this obligation to notify the Attorney General is mandatory, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 5 will also clarify and simplify another important procedure. Currently Alberta's Attorney General must be formally notified when anyone formally questions, again through the courts, the constitutional validity of the province's laws. This notification is of course designed to allow the Attorney General to be prepared to appear and be heard in any proceeding on behalf of the people of Alberta. It is vital and in the interest of all Albertans that the Attorney General be notified in this way. Doing so ensures that the Attorney General can be properly prepared to defend the validity of Alberta's legislation.

At present, Mr. Speaker, these requirements to notify the Attorney General are contained in Alberta's Judicature Act and the Administrative Procedures and Jurisdiction Act. Bill 5 will consolidate these notification requirements into the Notice to the Attorney General Act. The notification provisions in the Judicature Act and the Administrative Procedures and Jurisdiction Act would be repealed. Consolidating these notice requirements in one place will increase transparency as well as make it easier to comply with these requirements.

4:40

The Notice to the Attorney General Act will also facilitate future changes that may become necessary as trends in litigation evolve over time. Bill 5 will provide the authority for regulations adopting new notice requirements as they are needed. This will help ensure that the Attorney General receives the type of information that is needed in situations involving aboriginal consultation or other constitutional matters. This legislation ensures that the Attorney General is aware of and prepared to deal with issues important to all Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

I would encourage all hon. members to support Bill 5. At this time I would move that we adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 6**  
**Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2011**

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to stand before the Assembly today and move second reading of Bill 6, the Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2011.

The *Rules of Court*, which govern practice and procedure in the Court of Queen's Bench, were substantially revised after a multi-year review. I'm very pleased to fulfill this function on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General because I know how much work went into this, and I know the passion that he has for these particular rules since he is a lawyer himself.

Mr. Speaker, the review was led by the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and it was supported by the judiciary, by Alberta Justice, by a representative from the legal profession, and also by other stakeholders. The new rules, which came into effect on November 1, 2010, simplify and update many of the procedures in the litigation process. This particular bill will amend language and procedures relating to court proceedings in a number of acts to make them consistent with the new language and updated procedures used in the *Alberta Rules of Court*. The changes will help Albertans better understand civil litigation.

There are some amendments that I'd like to comment on here briefly. Just let me explain to all members and to all Albertans participating in their homes or wherever how these amendments that are proposed in this bill will streamline processes and make court proceedings clearer and far easier to understand.

A number of acts, such as the old rules, use the terms "guardian ad litem" and "next friend" to describe a person who defends or brings a lawsuit on behalf of a person who cannot defend or bring the lawsuit personally, such as would be the case with a dependent adult or a child. One term applies to a person who defends a lawsuit, the other to a person who brings a lawsuit, which can be confusing, obviously. "Guardian ad litem" and "next friend" will be replaced by the single modernized term "litigation representative," which is the term used in the new rules to describe a person who defends or brings a lawsuit on behalf of people who cannot do so themselves.

Some acts, including the Residential Tenancies Act, follow the procedure in the old rules for the recovery of possession of land or premises. This is another important point. The old rules required a person who obtained a court order giving them the right to recover possession of land or premises to go back to court to obtain a document called a writ to have the court order enforced. Now procedures in the new rules allow that court order to be enforced without having to obtain a writ. The act will be amended to be consistent with procedures in the new rules, thus eliminating the requirement to obtain the writ and thus simplifying the procedure for recovering possession of land or premises. Some acts, including the Land Titles Act, have provisions rooted in the old rules, rules that required many court documents to have the court seal put on them. This is another important point because the new rules will streamline processes by providing that the court seal be used only as necessary. The acts will be amended to remove the requirement for the court seal to be put on certain documents consistent with the new rules.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see and hear from the examples I've just outlined, this legislation will ensure that the acts are consistent with the new rules. Bill 6, in fact, will help Albertans better understand and navigate the court system, allowing them greater access to justice. Therefore, I would urge all members to support this important piece of legislation, and at this time I'd like to move that we adjourn debate on this bill.

Thank you very much.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 7**  
**Corrections Amendment Act, 2011**

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure on behalf of the hon. minister to move second reading of the Corrections Amendment Act, 2011.

I'd just say that I will be supporting this particular legislation. I think it's an important piece of legislation for Albertans to have.

I will move that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 8**  
**Missing Persons Act**

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand before the Assembly today and move second reading of Bill 8, Missing Persons Act.

This act will allow a police agency to access the personal information they need to help find missing persons in cases where the police have no reason to suspect that a crime has been committed. In the spring of 2010 the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police passed a resolution asking the government of Alberta to develop missing persons legislation. After extensive consultation with the Calgary Police Service, the Edmonton Police Service, and the RCMP, I'm pleased to be speaking to that legislation today in the House, Mr. Speaker.

Currently when police are conducting a criminal investigation, they obtain a production order under the Criminal Code to access records and information. However, when police are conducting a missing persons investigation where no crime is suspected, a production order is not available. This inability to access information has the ability to stall or halt missing persons investigations. The Missing Persons Act was developed to allow access to information critical in missing persons investigations, thereby increasing the ability to conduct a successful investigation.

The Missing Persons Act is based on the belief that an adult who is not a represented adult has a right to disappear if they choose. For all missing persons investigations the information collected under the Missing Persons Act is confidential. Police will only be able to use or release this information for those uses that are permitted in the Missing Persons Act. Police will be able to use the information when the missing persons investigation becomes a criminal investigation. The Missing Persons Act allows police to move quickly and efficiently locate missing persons. It also ensures that the information collected is protected if the formerly missing person does not want to be contacted.

A person who contravenes the privacy and permitted use sections of the Missing Persons Act, as with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of not more than \$10,000.

To access information, police will obtain a court order that will set out what records are required. The court will not be able to allow access to records that are protected by the solicitor-client privilege.

4:50

In emergency situations, when police believe a missing person may be at risk of harm or death, the police can issue a demand for

a specified list of records that are urgently needed to locate a missing person. Records and information collected must be kept separate from other police agency records. If a person fails to comply with a police demand, police can obtain a court order directing the person to comply.

If the missing person is a minor or a represented adult under the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, the court can authorize the police to enter premises to look for the missing person, by force if necessary, Mr. Speaker. When there is a reason to believe that a minor or a represented adult is in the company of a third party, the court can order the release of the third party's records in order to give police the information needed to find the minor or represented adult.

Alberta is the first jurisdiction in Canada to introduce legislation dedicated to assisting police with missing persons investigations. This bill will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of missing persons investigations. Mr. Speaker, helping families locate loved ones who have been reported missing is an extremely important job done by our police services across this province. The Missing Persons Act will provide the police with another tool to bring these cases to a quick and positive outcome.

Mr. Speaker, all of us in this House have opened the newspaper and read stories about people who have seemingly vanished. In many of these cases it's extremely difficult for police to make a determination of a criminal act. These stories are usually wrought with the anguish of family members and friends left with no answers as to where they've gone or what to do next. I can think of several of these cases in Alberta just over the past couple of years.

There is a case in Edmonton right now where an elderly couple has gone missing seemingly without a trace. Co-workers, friends, and family members are at a complete loss as to what has happened to them. But the Edmonton police do not have access to the records they would need to make a possible advancement in this case, so months since the disappearance of their loved ones they continue to wait and hold out hope. There are stories like this across the province, and my heart goes out to the families. I hope this legislation will help provide some of those answers when they are needed most.

I'd like to give a special commendation to the members for Calgary-Currie and Airdrie-Chestermere for meeting with me and hearing the merits of this bill. Thank you both for taking the time to get a better understanding of what this bill can accomplish and the impact it can have for thousands of Albertans and their families.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate at this time. Thank you, sir.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Consideration of His Honour  
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Drysdale moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour Colonel (Retired) the Honourable Donald S. Ethell, OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 23: Mr. Lukaszuk]

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to be able to rise this afternoon and offer a few of my comments on the throne speech which was delivered to members of this Assembly last week. The speech at the time, when I first saw it, struck me as incredibly familiar, and I think that in many ways it was a speech that consisted of promises being reissued over and over again.

Several of the promises that were identified in that speech were, in fact, sort of recycled positions from previous occasions, and it really highlighted for me the lack of energy and the lack of focus and the lack of direction that this government is bringing into this Assembly this spring. It was a throne speech that really did not set out a particularly strong vision. It claimed to do that, but then by reaching back to promises and statements that had been made in previous throne speeches year after year, the speech ultimately rang very hollow, and I think it was very disappointing for a number of Albertans.

This was a speech that did a lot of what this government tends to do in that it really talks the talk, but year after year after year it fails to walk the walk, as it were. We hear grand statements of investing in the future, of attracting people to Alberta, investing in the education of young Albertans, yet we don't see any kind of significant action in that regard. As a result, we end up continuing a failed record of broken promises to Albertans, and it's a number of these broken promises that I'd like to talk a little bit about right now as a starting point.

I think that the throne speech itself talked about the need to care for our seniors and to cherish and invest in our health care system and improve our health care system. Unfortunately, though, the throne speech itself continued to insist upon referring to investments that are clearly shown to not be what is needed by Alberta seniors and not what is needed within our health care system in order to take the pressure off it, whether we're talking about our emergency rooms or our surgical suites or our acute-care beds. In essence, the throne speech failed to promise what Albertans were promised in the 2008 election and which the government has failed to deliver, which is a genuine investment in providing proper long-term care for our seniors and other disabled Albertans.

In failing to talk about that and, instead, using perhaps focus-tested words that they think Albertans actually interpret as being meaningful, continuing care and assisted living – you know, we can talk about all the different ways in which the government talks about their alternative to long-term care, but Albertans get it. Albertans understand, Mr. Speaker, that what's happening here is that the government is letting them down, that the government made a promise, but they are not keeping their promise, and they are trying to play a quick game of bait and switch. Frankly, Albertans are not falling for that game.

The other thing that I was disappointed to not see enough attention paid to in the throne speech is the issue of mental health. For years this province has desperately ignored the state of mental health throughout the province and throughout communities all over the province. In so doing, again, we contribute directly to increasing costs at the most expensive point within our health care system, and that is in acute-care beds and in emergency rooms and in hospitals.

Not only do we do that – and I don't like to just talk about it from a cost perspective; I also want to talk about what it means for Albertans – but by failing to provide proper mental health services within our communities, we undermine our communities, we undermine our relationships with each other, and we make a statement about the strength of our communities and the strength of our commitment to one another, which, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, is not a statement about which I am at all proud. It is a

statement which, unfortunately, has led to a lot of deprivation in the lives of Albertans struggling with mental health issues and in the lives of their families. By failing to address that issue in the throne speech, this government has once again left many Albertans behind.

Another thing that the throne speech spoke about was education. Mr. Speaker, I have to say that one of the areas that is under increasing pressure within our province is our education system. At the beginning of this decade the government took the time to establish the Learning Commission. Clear recommendations were made, not all of which I agree with, but there were, nonetheless, many recommendations made, and those recommendations have been consistently ignored. Year after year the government gets further and further away from the objectives that were included in those recommendations that were geared towards improving the educational outcomes and success of Alberta's children and young adults. Well, children at that point because it was K to 12.

**5:00**

At the point we're at now, we see class sizes growing. Then in the midst of that, we see the infrastructure deficit coming to roost in communities across the province where inadequate schooling facilities are provided. In the meantime the government is jeopardizing and gambling with Albertans' future by choosing to do the inadequate amount of capital construction required in education through P3 models.

More importantly, though, is that there is a profound problem developing in terms of the way we are failing special-needs children within our education system. The throne speech reference to a positive future with respect to what the expectations can be for special-needs children and their families is very misleading because the government's plan with respect to setting the direction is in many ways analogous to the kind of plan that governments came up with in the early '70s, when they said they were going to, you know, deinstitutionalize people and follow them into the community and that everything would just sort of organically work for those people. Of course, what happened was that we created a homeless population that we are profoundly unable to deal with right now.

Of course, it's not that I'm equating special-needs students to people with mental illnesses one way or the other. The point is that when you make grand statements of how the community will just organically care for people that need specific, professional, best-practice, peer-researched, properly evaluated, well-trained support in our education system, and then you suggest that they will somehow organically be supported by changing the rules and removing the rules, then what you're really doing is releasing those kids into the education community with the clear understanding and expectation that they will be lost within that community and that the quality of the education they receive will deteriorate dramatically.

I say this because, you know, over the last three years I have spoken to people who work within the system – teachers, parents, kids who've graduated from the system, school trustees, speech pathologists, psychologists – and they all say that they're incredibly worried about the direction the government is taking in education as it relates to special-needs children. There is nothing that has been said or done by this government that should expect us to have any faith that we will see anything other than a significant reduction in the support provided to special-needs kids over the course of the next five or 10 years. That process is signalled within this throne speech, and it is very concerning to many Albertans.



Another area, again, when I talk about talking the talk but not walking the walk, is the environment. For years now, since I've been elected, I've heard the government plan to put into place, you know, land-use frameworks: we can't designate a park until we've got the land-use framework in place, and we can't set water-use limits here until we've got the land-use framework in place, and we can't do any of this stuff. Then, of course, meanwhile, industrial development and other types of development continue unfettered. We continue to talk about a land-use framework, but of course the money to actually fund the development of that framework has been cut over the last couple of years, and now we anticipate a number of changes to that process anyway.

In the meantime, for the last two and a half or three years, that process has been used as an excuse for inaction by this government on a whole number of different areas that ultimately impact the integrity and the sustainability of our environment across the province. So it's another example of talk, talk, talk but not actually getting anything done, not actually setting into place any new programs or policies or changes to how we do things.

When it comes to the environment, generally we have a government that anticipates a tripling of oil and gas revenues over the course of the next 10 to 15 years, yet we have not increased resources or plans to increase the quality or the quantity of our environmental protection efforts, which, of course, means that we actually plan to reduce the quality and the quantity of our environmental protection efforts given the expected increase in industrial activity. This again is another betrayal of future generations, of future Albertans. By failing to take responsibility for what we need to do to protect our environment, by failing to stand up for Albertans' public interests against specific industrial projects or in association with, even, specific industrial projects, this government betrays the future of Albertans.

Industrial development, job creation activities can go forward, should go forward, but they should and must go forward with a rigorous – rigorous – environmental regime in place, and that is not what we have right now. Over the last six months we have had repeated third-party experts, academics who were not tied to any particular financial interest, observe and assess our environmental regime, and every time it has come up failing. Every time it has come up inadequate. Over and over and over again we are told that this government has dropped the ball in terms of environmental protection.

We don't even know what we're not doing because we're so behind in checking on what we're doing, yet this government brings forward a vision in that regard that makes no provision for acting quickly to increase or improve our environmental protection regime in this province. In so doing, we once again hear lots of talk but, really, absolutely no action, and it's the kind of thing that once again will come home to roost for Albertans long into the future. That's the kind of decision-making that this government often does. It's decision-making that's easy now but not so easy to address five, 10, 15 years down the road.

Another area that, of course, we are concerned about is that once again the government continues to shortchange Albertans in

our collection of resource revenue. The throne speech reaffirms the plan to move forward on continuing to give royalty breaks to nonrenewable resource producers in our province such that we have probably one of the least productive royalty regimes in the developed world, yet at the same time we have the most stable resource-producing environment. We have the ability to sit at the table and demand more on behalf of Albertans, on behalf of Albertans who will come after us, but we don't do it because it's a tough job and we tend to avoid tough jobs in this government. Instead, Albertans have a savings fund from our vast, vast nonrenewable resources which is a pittance compared to any other developed country that sees most of its economic activity coming from the nonrenewable resource sector, and that again is a betrayal to future Albertans.

I do want to talk a little bit as well about where we're going in the future . . . [Ms Notley's speaking time expired] I appear to be finished.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Yes. I believe the hon. member had an important message in all of this, and we were all paying rapt attention. I know that she probably got cut short, so if she just wanted to complete her comments, I would allow her that privilege.

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

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you. I will ever so briefly say – there were just a couple more points – that as the government again talks about looking to the future, making Alberta a vibrant place to invest and to move forward in, we of course are looking at a plan to reduce the investment in advanced education and to also reduce the supports that we provide to new immigrants, that in theory we want to have move to our province, who will then contribute to the type of growth that the government suggests it's interested in achieving in the future. It seems to me to be yet another example of saying one thing but doing another.

Having said that, though, I would like to move adjournment of this debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In view of good progress this afternoon I'm going to move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 tomorrow and just remind members that the policy field committee called Resources and Environment will be reconvening at 6:30 p.m. in this Chamber to discuss the estimates related to International and Intergovernmental Relations.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:10 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]



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