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The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature

Fourth Session

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Blakeman
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Marz
Notley
Quest
Rogers

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 24, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome back.

On this day of new beginnings we ask for Your guidance in the responsibility we are undertaking and Your help in fulfilling our duties for the enduring benefit of all Albertans. As Members of this Legislative Assembly may we faithfully serve our province of Alberta. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, would you now please join us in the signing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Feel free to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Statements by the Speaker

Welcome to the Premier

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the outset of today's Routine I'd like to welcome two members who return to this Assembly as leaders of their respective parties.

In 1916 the Legislative Assembly of Alberta passed legislation which gave the vote to women and, by extension, the right to serve. In a general election held on June 7, 1917, Louise McKinney became the first woman elected to a Legislature in the British Empire.

Two months later, on September 18, 1917, an extension of the June 7, 1917, election was held in the trenches of northern France and southern Belgium to elect two service people to serve as representatives at large for Alberta. Twenty-one candidates ran for two seats. Twenty candidates were men, and one was a woman, Roberta MacAdams from Stony Plain, who was serving as a sister, a nurse, in the trenches. With her campaign slogan Give One Vote to the Man of Your Choice and the Other to the Sister, Roberta MacAdams came in second in the 21-person race and became the other first woman to have been elected to a Legislature in the British Empire.

In 1921 Irene Parlby became the first woman cabinet minister in Alberta's history when she was appointed minister without portfolio.

Three women of the Famous Five served in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta: Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby.

The first woman granted full ministerial status in our history was Helen Hunley when she was appointed Solicitor General in 1973. Subsequently Helen Hunley was to become our first woman Lieutenant Governor and served from 1985 to 1991. The first

woman recognized as Leader of the Opposition in this Legislative Assembly was Nancy MacBeth, who served from 1998 to 2001. The first woman to be appointed Minister of Justice and Attorney General was the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow in 2008.

In Alberta's history 64 women have been elected to this Legislature. Twenty-one have served as cabinet ministers, and since October 7, 2011, one has served as Premier.

Welcome today to Alberta's 14th Premier, the first woman Premier in the 106-year history of Alberta, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, the hon. Madam Premier. [Standing ovation]

Welcome to the Leader of the Official Opposition

The Speaker: Two sword-lengths away and across from the Premier sits the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. The position of Leader of the Opposition has evolved through custom, procedural interpretation by the Speaker, and governance by the Legislative Assembly. From 1905 until an amendment to the Legislative Assembly Act came into effect in 1972, the tenures of Leaders of the Official Opposition were based on actual session dates. In other words, Alberta had no Leader of the Official Opposition outside of session from 1905 to 1972. During that period Alberta had 19 different men serve as leader. For the periods 1926 to 1940, 1949 to 1951, and 1960 to 1963, no individual served as leader either in or out of session in the province of Alberta.

The Legislative Assembly Act of 1972 was the first legislation in Alberta's history to address the actual full-time tenure of the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and was the first legislation to provide for an equitable stipend for the leader. A further amendment to the Legislative Assembly Act in 1983 clarified principles regarding the recognition of the Official Opposition that would be employed by the Speaker.

Since 1972 Alberta has had an additional 10 men and one woman serve as Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. From 1905 to 2011 we've had 30 different leaders. While Premier Peter Lougheed was the only Official Opposition Leader in Alberta's first 106 years to become a Premier, four former Official Opposition Leaders were to become Lieutenant Governors.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was recognized on September 13 as Alberta's 30th Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Welcome to Alberta's new Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a great honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly someone who is no stranger to this House, and that is my friend Karen Kryczka, a former member of this House from Calgary-West from 1997 to 2004 as well as a former Calgary board of education trustee from 2007 to 2010. Karen is a loyal community volunteer, a good friend of mine. We share a great friendship. We also shared a very close time this year with the passing of our mothers. It was wonderful for her to be able to come today. I'd like everyone in this House who knows her to give her a really warm round of applause and to welcome her back.

1:40

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly someone who really needs no introduction as well. It's Denis Herard, the former member for my constituency, Calgary-Egmont, from 1993 to 2008. Mr. Herard also served as minister of advanced education and won four successive pluralities in that constituency. Denis and his wife, Rose, reside in Maple Ridge, a few minutes away from where I reside, and I was privileged to earn his support in the last election. Please join me in welcoming Denis Herard.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an excellent Albertan, someone who for the past two years has been travelling through this great province of ours, listening to the concerns of all Albertans. Whether it has been through her time at the Fraser Institute, the *Calgary Herald*, or CFIB, she has always put the ideas and principles of Albertans first. She is seated in the Speaker's gallery, the leader of the Wildrose Party, Danielle Smith. With that, I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two guests to introduce to the Assembly today. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery. The first is my wife, Mardell Olson. I had to clean my condo before she came up, and she is now here to finish the job. Our good friend Rhonda Harder Epp, a noted artist in western Canada, recently moved to Edmonton from Camrose, and I'm very pleased to have her here, too. I'd ask that they receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure of mine to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly four special guests, and I appreciate your accommodating them in your gallery. I'd ask them to rise as I introduce them. The first is Donna Bagdon, a very good friend of mine, and Brian Heidecker, as well a very good friend of mine; and then my parents, Keith and Maureen Griffiths. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly somebody very important to me, my better half, Sharon MacLean. She's been there with me through the tough times and the good times. I'd just ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you my constituency staff, Margaret Thibault. Margaret is a great representative of the constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne and does outstanding work for me. Not only do I want to introduce her; I want to thank her for all the great work that she does. Thank you, Margaret.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two schools from my constituency, grade 6 students. From the Monsignor Fee Otterson school in the Rutherford community there are 61 students with us, and they're accompanied by their teachers and parent helpers Miss Chantel Gresniuk and Mrs. Michelle Armstrong.

Also joining us today are 31 students from George H. Luck school. They're accompanied by their teacher, Ms Melissa Bruins, and parent helpers Mrs. Sherece Creasy, Mr. Sean Rickard, and Mrs. Susanne Mohler.

I usually, in introducing the students, reference the fact that they're among the best and the brightest students we have in this province, and I think that's true of these two schools in my constituency today. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members a group of grade 9 students from the Ponoka composite high school. They're seated in the public gallery, right behind me. There are 32 grade 9 students, two teachers, and a bus driver. The teachers are Mr. Brady Teeling and Mrs. Maryann LaFrance, and the bus driver is Mrs. Linda Nobles. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm applause of all the members of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce some guests from the great institution in Edmonton-Riverview, the University of Alberta, and one of their schools, the School of Business, which is working to establish itself more and more strongly as a global school. The group today is connected with those global programs. There are 29 visitors. Twenty-four will be in the members' gallery and five in the public gallery, I understand. I'm not sure they're here yet, but if they are, I'd ask them to rise. Their group leaders are Jane Ji, Yu Bao, and George Zhang.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today four people with the Edmonton-Calder based company Priority Printing. They are Tim Downey, the company president; Robin Chapelsky, production manager; Julie Lundy, their prepress manager; and Joanne Safron, a finishing technician. I'll tell you a little more about these fine folks in a member's statement shortly, but for now I would ask them to rise – I believe they're in the public gallery – and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to rise this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly eight special guests representing Alberta's Ukrainian community, who are in attendance on the members' side to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Ukraine's independence. I would ask each of these guests to please rise as I mention their name: Luba Feduschak, president, Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Edmonton branch; Roger Pullishy, president, the

Friends of the Ukrainian Village Society; Steve Romaniuk, vice-president, Ukrainian Seniors' Club of Marko Boyeslaw; Serhiy Kostyuk, provincial co-ordinator, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council; George Kotovych, director, Plast youth organization; Petro Dackiw, director, League of Ukrainian Canadians; Maria Romaniuk, League of Ukrainian Canadian Women; Motria Dackiw, League of Ukrainian Canadian Women. We are very honoured that they are with us today, and I would ask that they accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a fine group of constituents and community volunteers, starting with my lovely wife of 17 years, Fiona; our friend Roxanne McReavy; the constituency association president and regional director, Sue Timinson; the treasurer of our constituency association and local entrepreneur, Clinton Alexander; and Lorette Strong, our constituency office manager. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce three guests today. First and foremost, this young man is the nominated candidate in Sherwood Park. He's finishing his master's degree at the London School of Economics, and he's lived in Sherwood Park for a considerable period of time. Garnett Genuis is in the gallery. I'd like to ask him to rise.

Also, my wife of 24 years and our four-year-old son are with us, but I've just been informed that he was making too much noise, so he just went outside but will continue making noise later on this afternoon, certainly, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, a lady who worked in my legislative office. She is the better half of the former minister of finance, Dr. Lyle Oberg. Evelyn Oberg is with us today, and I'd ask her to rise and receive the very warm welcome of all members of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guests from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. As Alberta's largest union AUPE represents 80,000 hard-working Albertans, your working people. President Guy Smith is here to show AUPE's commitment to the services those members provide to the public. The Alberta NDP is proud to stand with all AUPE members in protecting public services that benefit all Albertans. I would now ask my guests to rise as I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Guy Smith, Tyler Bedford, and Mark Wells.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my constituency assistant. Seated in the public gallery is Emma Ronan with her partner, Cole. I'd ask you to rise and enjoy the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? There being none, then four words – beautiful, intelligent, delightful, and loving – are words I use to describe my wife, Kristina, who also happens to be here.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Incremental Ethane Extraction Program

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The former Energy minister and current Finance minister gave two energy companies an inside track on an ethane program worth a third of a billion dollars before it was even approved by cabinet. To the Premier: is this the kind of change that the Premier promised Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This was information that was made available to us through the public today. It's certainly something that I've asked the Minister of Energy to take a look at. Our information to date is that this is a program that's open to all industry stakeholders, that absolutely no one was prejudiced with respect to this. However, what I will say is that I have asked the Minister of Energy to provide a full disclosure of the facts that will be made publicly available so that we can all review it.

Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Again to the Premier: given that the Williams-NOVA partnership had the inside track on such a generous government program, how does the Premier explain to the taxpayers the \$310 million head start the former Energy minister gave to his friends?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I wouldn't expect anything more from the hon. Leader of the Opposition, it is a characterization that still needs to be found to be conclusive or true. As I've said, the Minister of Energy will be providing a full set of facts that all Albertans will be able to scrutinize. What we will see from that is that this was an open, transparent process, open to anyone who is willing to participate and apply for the program, and that no one was prejudiced in any way.

Dr. Sherman: Finally, to the Premier: given that senior staff actually participated in the disclosure of insider information and ended up being promoted, is this the kind of behaviour that the Premier will continue to reward?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has a characterization of a set of circumstances. We will have the facts before us. They will be publicly available. All Albertans will be able to assess whether or not anyone was prejudiced, and I assert that they weren't.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. NOVA Chemicals said that its deal with Williams couldn't have happened without the current Finance minister's help. To the Premier: if this happened in one department, how do we know that other departments are not leaking highly valuable information that will benefit their friends?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition can stand up 19 times and allege certain circumstances which I don't happen to agree with, but more importantly, as I've said, the facts will be made available. Albertans will judge.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: the facts will soon be out. In fact, they're out already. Given that her Finance minister clearly broke government confidentiality, what will the Premier do to hold her minister to account to get to the bottom of this scandal?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition keeps using the same words, so I will as well. These are characterizations and conclusions that are not warranted by the information that we have available. The full facts will be made available. If for any reason there is anyone who was prejudiced as a result of this, not only will Albertans know, but we will know in this House, and we will deal with it at that point.

Dr. Sherman: Finally, to the Premier: how many more scandals will we have to uncover before the Premier does something real to win back the trust of Albertans?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, again, these words are inflammatory. They're not necessary. The facts will be made available. We do not have a scandal here. What we have is a tempest in a teapot.

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

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, given that Williams Energy retained the Lobbyists Act on their behalf in order to see changes to the ethane extraction program, a move that eventually paid off, getting Williams and NOVA on an inside track to receive up to \$310 million in taxpayer subsidies, to the Energy minister: when does the minister plan to stop this unethical influence that lobbyists continue to have on his ministry?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition has clearly had a long time to build up their imagination over the last six months. Insider implies that somehow it was secret. Eighteen different companies consulted for 12 months on the development of this policy, plus trade associations. There was absolutely nothing secret about it whatsoever.

Mr. Hehr: Given that the facts speak for themselves and that Williams Energy has donated at least \$12,500 to the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta in the last two years, how are the citizens of Alberta not to draw the conclusion that this government grants special access to PC Party contributors?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member here is playing fast and loose with the facts. There was absolutely nothing time sensitive about this whatsoever. The program existed prior to this. The program exists today. There is still money in the program. Three other companies have taken advantage of it since then. There was no inside information. It was not time sensitive. In fact, it's a success story. We need more ethane for our petrochemical industry.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, here are the facts. Given that at least 12 days prior to cabinet even approving changes to the ethane incentive program the Energy ministry selectively informed their friends of a final decision while others were left in the dark, will the minister explain how this is not a good deal that gave Williams and NOVA an advantage in competing for these taxpayer dollars?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it's obvious, with the Liberals not having been in government since 1921, they've forgotten the fact

that policy development in the executive branch and in the administrative branch develop simultaneously. Otherwise, it would be hopelessly inefficient. As I said, there was absolutely nothing time sensitive about this whatsoever. There was money in the program before. There's money in the program today. Other companies have enrolled in the program. The good news here is that it is producing additional ethane for our petrochemical industry.

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

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we are supposed to receive a decision from the AUC on the fate of the heartland transmission line. Last week the Energy minister halted three major lines, including heartland. However, the Premier overruled him and said that she wanted heartland to proceed because she believes it's critical infrastructure. This blatant political interference destroys any credibility this process has left. To the Premier: will she admit that it was inappropriate for her as the Premier to declare the heartland line critical three days before the AUC decision?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, for eight months I've said that I believe that the heartland transmission line was critical. The AUC has undertaken their process. It's an independent process. They'll release their decision. I'm looking forward to seeing that decision. It's entirely appropriate for them to do that. I expect that if the AUC was in any way concerned about the compromising of their independence, they'd have commented on it.

Mr. Hinman: Well, given that the AUC is now delaying the release of their decision for a week because of the Premier and given that Albertans always wonder whether this decision is being changed to suit her declaration that it should go ahead, will she apologize to the AUC and to Albertans for her lack of judgment and inappropriate interference?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is quite disappointing in political debate right now in Alberta is that whenever political parties think they can make a political point, they undermine the integrity of the independent institutions, and we're not going to do that.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, she's the one who's undermining it.

Again to the Premier. Given that you refuse to answer my questions and do the right thing, let's get to the root of the issue, Bill 50, and the sweeping power that it gives the Premier and your cabinet. Will you repeal this legislation and reinstate a truly qualified, independent, and objective needs assessment for determining our transmission needs?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we've said that the heartland line was critical. We've also said, and we believe on this side of the House, that it's important to review the economic imperative of one of the north-south lines. It's going to be important to do that in order to ensure that we are making the best economic choices for Albertans, and we'll do that.

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

2:00

Health Care Privatization

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On July 12, 2010, the current minister of health made a presentation on health care strategy to the PC caucus based on a report from May 2010 released today by the NDP. Proposals were made by the now

minister of health and included delisting of insured services and more private insurance options, allowing a greater role for private hospitals and government-sponsored queue-jumping. My question is for the Premier. Why has she appointed an advocate for private health care as her minister of health?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you that right now this government is committed to a public health care system that's accessible for all Albertans. That's the intention of everything we will do in the future.

Mr. Mason: Given that previous governments have made the same assertion before an election only to turn around and do the opposite or try to once they are elected and given that the current minister of health made health care privatization proposals to a closed-door meeting of the Tory caucus but omitted them from the public reports he issued, why has this Premier appointed a minister who hides his privatization agenda from the public?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have one agenda for health care in this province. It's to have a publicly funded health care system that's accessible to all Albertans and to ensure that Albertans have confidence in that system. That's what our cabinet supports.

Mr. Mason: Two former Premiers gave exactly the same assertion. Given that the current minister of health has been an advocate of private hospitals, private insurance, government-sponsored queue-jumping, and more, why would this Premier appoint him as health minister if not because the privatization agenda of this progressive government, Progressive Conservative government has not changed?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party is absolutely right. We are a progressive government. We are committed to public health care. We have been committed to that. We want Albertans to have confidence in that system, and everything we do is going to ensure that that is the case.

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

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. This government has a very long political history of interference with the electrical regulatory process in this province. The political interference has already cost electricity consumers in this province billions of dollars. My first question is to the Premier. What will this government's latest flip-flop on transmission infrastructure costs eventually cost ratepayers throughout this province?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I've been completely consistent with respect to my view on the heartland transmission line. I'm looking forward to the AUC decision. Once that decision is rendered, we will know what the costs are.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Given that less than two years ago electricity ratepayers in this province were forced to pay an additional \$35 million for a transmission line that was never built, can the Premier guarantee that ratepayers will not have to pay for this latest transmission flip-flop by this government?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we've been entirely consistent with respect to our approach on these lines. There has been no change in policy. We are going to continue to ensure that any decisions

that are made with respect to transmission are going to be in the best economic interests of this province.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. When did the Premier find out that the Minister of Energy wanted to suspend these three transmission projects that have been deemed by this government to be critical infrastructure?

Ms Redford: Well, first, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. member read the letter. That isn't what the letter asked for, so that might be one thing you might want to take a look at.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that it was very clear – and I said this on Friday at my public comments about this for the first time – that I was made aware of that letter and the correspondence and the request on Friday morning at approximately 10 o'clock. I've been very clear about that. To be very clear, this is a position . . .

Mr. MacDonald: You sent the letter on Wednesday.

Ms Redford: That's not the question that I was asked.

Mr. Speaker, the question that needs to be answered here is what we are doing with respect to those lines, and I will tell you. I'm very proud of the fact that we're going to take a look at those north-south lines and take a look at what's in the best economic interests of this province.

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

Education Funding

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents were very pleased to learn that one of our new Premier's first actions was to provide additional education funds to local school boards. My first question is to the Minister of Education. Since the school year has already started, will it be too late for this funding to make a real difference this year?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, first, Mr. Speaker, no, it's not too late. School boards have been advised that this additional funding is to be directed to children. One of the requests upon the school board is to make sure that every single dollar of that \$107 million will be directed directly into our classroom so that your child somewhere out there sitting in a school in Alberta will actually see a measurable difference in their quality of education.

Mrs. Leskiw: My next question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us whether the school boards, the local authorities on the ground, have full discretion to use the funds, or are there going to be strings attached to these funds?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, every time we spend taxpayers' dollars, there are always strings attached, obviously, but one of the overarching requirements was, as I indicated in my previous answer, that the dollars find their way all the way down to the desks and the children in our classrooms. At the end of the day that was the Premier's commitment, and it is this government's commitment to make sure that education is there for our children, not for principals, not for teachers, not for the minister, not for government but for the children sitting in the desks.

Mrs. Leskiw: My last question is to the same minister. Flexibility is important. So is accountability. How will this government ensure that the dollars being used by the school boards are definitely going to benefit the students of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, our school boards are under a scrupulous audit by the Auditor General and internal audits and audits by this ministry. In addition to the usual auditing process, which I don't believe leaves much to be desired, I have asked each and every school board to report to me so that I can report to you, hon. member, and to all Albertans on how these additional dollars were actually spent and what measurable differences they have made in the lives of our students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Health Quality Council Review

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this month the former minister of health cast further doubt on the Health Quality Council of Alberta's investigation into allegations of widespread political meddling, queue-jumping, and physician intimidation. He said that the investigation, quote, would be a waste of time and money that would ultimately conclude the allegations are frivolous. End quote. To the Premier: given the minister's attempts to influence the Health Quality Council report, will the Premier finally change the reporting relationship of the Health Quality Council from the minister to this Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can assure this House – and I have no idea where the hon. member is getting his information – that no member of this government has attempted to influence in any way the review that is under way by the Health Quality Council. That being said, I think our Premier has been very clear over the last eight months. There is a desire on the part of this government to establish the Health Quality Council as an independent body reporting to this Legislature. We'll have a bit more to say about that in the next few weeks.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good news.

Given such blatant interference by a senior minister will the Premier finally fulfill her campaign promise and immediately call a public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, without the benefit of any background as to the allegations that the hon. member is making – once again, the Premier has been very clear. This government is committed to a fully independent inquiry into the allegations that were raised. There is a review under way by the Health Quality Council at this time. We will wait to see the results of that review and in due course have more to say about the inquiry.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the minister clearly violated the Health Quality Council's own confidentiality rules, what did the Premier do to take action on this violation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, if the opposition wants to inhabit the ground of conspiracy theories and characterizations, we'll leave that to them. Our commitment is to improving the performance of our publicly funded health care system. That means focusing on primary care, family care clinics, continuing care, and mental health. That's where our focus will be. These procedural matters will be explained in full as time goes on.

Thank you.

Slave Lake Fire Evacuation Order

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, on May 15 about 10,000 residents were evacuated due to the Slave Lake fire. Many residents have been frustrated and upset that an evacuation order came too late or never came at all. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why wasn't one issued sooner or even at all?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to answer this question. I know that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake has a deep personal concern for the people in her constituency, and I know that she spent a lot of time there, dedicated to helping them in any way she could.

I'm very pleased to report, actually, that in Slave Lake we had municipal officials and emergency service workers that worked very quickly. We would have issued an emergency clearance order faster except that high winds caused the fire to spread very quickly.

2:10

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, we in Lesser Slave Lake have learned the hard way about not receiving warnings to give us enough time to leave. It's just amazing how we were able to save the people that we did. I believe other Albertans want to know that they'll be given enough time to respond to the same situation. To the same minister: what are you doing to ensure Albertans get the warnings they need when seconds count so that they don't have to suffer like my constituents did?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've actually moved to a new system called Alberta emergency alert. Not only are we still using ground staff to alert people and evacuate them in serious conditions; we're also utilizing Facebook and Twitter, a dedicated website, and still ground-to-ground face communications so that we can give staged or phased warnings, updates to people so that they can better prepare instead of just that emergency warning that says to clear out. They can actually prepare more and take care of their goods and move in a timely fashion. We're very proud of this new system.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I'm really pleased to know that we are going to be doing it in a timely fashion.

What assurances can you give Albertans of any kind of new emergency alerts that will be used in the future for events like this so that we don't see this kind of thing happen again?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, Mr. Speaker, every municipality is responsible for emergencies such as this. We're training all of the staff on the ground, our municipal representatives as well as emergency personnel, so that they're fully aware of all of the degrees of alerts that could be sent out and how to best utilize them so that we have the best prepared staff on the ground.

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

Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An alarming number of the 50 children killed while in this government's care in the past decade were First Nations; 67 per cent of the children currently in care have been taken from First Nations families. The abuse of Alberta's First Nations children hasn't ended. Instead, it has shifted from residential schools to provincial custodial care. To the Minister of Human Services: how can the government claim it is being culturally sensitive and responsible when it dumps six young children on relatives' doorsteps without due diligence?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member alludes to a matter which is still before the courts. I will say in a general sense that kinship care is a very important part of the care process for children in need. It is important in circumstances where families are available to keep children together and to keep them with family. That's often a choice that parents want to have if their children are being apprehended. They want to have a say in that process, so it's an important part of the process. The characterization is overly dramatic. It is important that we take care of children in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't suggest that 50 deaths is overly dramatic; it's a fact.

What efforts are being made to support children and their birth parents within their homes before forcing them into foster care or kinship care and fast-tracking the adoption process?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there is no intention on behalf of this government to take children out of families where families can be supported to help those children. It is not the first thing that government wants to do. At the front end of the system social workers and caregivers work with families first to make sure there are appropriate care plans where there is any indication of concern, and only after that, if there is a problem that cannot be resolved by support, do they apprehend the child.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given the supersizing of the new Human Services ministry, how is the minister going to ensure that vulnerable children and families don't get lost in this latest shuffle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a very important question and one that I want to answer by saying that I've worn this Children First pin since I was first appointed to the Ministry of Education, and I'm not taking it off any time soon. Children are going to be at the core of this ministry. You can support children by making sure that you support their families. You can support their families by making sure that they have the right links to education and skilling, the right links to a job, that there is a proper labour atmosphere. All of that comes together in a ministry that makes entirely good sense to support children and make sure that they get the opportunity to be successful in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Heartland Electricity Transmission Project

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a lot of confusion

last Friday regarding the status of the heartland transmission project before the Alberta Utilities Commission. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What happened on Friday?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure I speak for many people in the Assembly here to say that I'm proud to work for a Premier that keeps her promises. She's kept her promises, her campaign promises, on more funding for education. As Albertans are going to see, she's keeping many more promises soon on other types of reforms. One of the promises was on a review of Bill 50 to ensure that it does not undermine the economic competitiveness of Albertans. Pursuant to that I sent a letter to the AUC on Thursday. There was a misunderstanding – a misunderstanding – of which projects were to be included or not.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: what is the status of this application? Is it going ahead or not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was indicating, as soon as this misunderstanding was identified Friday morning, the Premier and I met. We corrected that immediately, and I have sent a letter today to the AUC requesting that they delete the heartland project from my request for delay. My understanding is that the AUC has indicated that they will issue a decision next week.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy. Many of my constituents have been advocating for burying the heartland transmission line. Is it being considered?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the AUC heard compelling arguments on both sides of the issue, the advantages and disadvantages of burying the proposed line, but because that is part of their decision, it would be inappropriate for me to speculate on that in the Assembly today. We'll wait until next week and, when we hear the decision, proceed accordingly.

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

Emergency Room Wait Times

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year after the former minister of health, with much self-congratulatory fanfare, promised to fix our ERs, wait times are back to where they were last October, and our long-term care wait-lists are growing. Will the minister of health admit that until the government unbreaks its promise on real long-term care beds, Albertans have nothing more than chaotic crisis management and failed promises to look forward to in our hospitals' ERs?

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While I will be the first to say that we still continue to need to make progress on emergency department wait times, a lot of progress has been made in the last year. The number of Albertans waiting in acute-care beds for continuing care has fallen over the last year from just over 700 down to 500 today. If you look at not one month's but a year's worth of progress on emergency department wait times,

you'll see that the average waiting time has come down considerably. That said, there is more to be done.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, given that, in fact, the number of people waiting in hospitals for proper long-term care is almost 40 per cent higher than the government's target, will the minister admit that their so-called continuing care strategy is failing to create the number of spaces that Albertans need for the level of care that they actually need?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Seniors and I are both concerned that the continuing care spaces that we're opening in Alberta are able to meet the needs of everyone who requires the level of care, including those who require long-term care. We'll be continuing to look at that. The goal of this government is to provide a range of housing options for seniors and for those who need a health care component, to provide that component in a form that meets their particular needs.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that less than one-third of emergency patients at the Royal Alex were treated in line with the minister's own emergency protocols, will the minister admit that until more long-term care spaces, not some other kind of hotel but long-term care spaces, are created, Albertans will continue to face unacceptable ER wait times?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things that need to be done. Unfortunately, if the problem was as simple as adding additional long-term care beds, I'm sure we would have had it solved a long time ago. What, in fact, we need to do is make primary care, family care clinics more accessible to Albertans so that people who can avoid going to the emergency department have the opportunity to do so. We certainly need to look at the range of continuing care options and make sure that we're meeting needs on that side of the equation as well.

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

Water Management

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's track record on water from monitoring in the oil sands to wetlands protection to commodifying water allocation frightens and puzzles Albertans. If they don't see concrete action taken quickly, then having added water to the ministry is a moot point. My questions today are to the new Minister of Environment and Water. If the Premier has stated that she isn't supportive of putting a price on water, then why does that option continue to be on the menu of choices available?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As the Premier has highlighted it in our ministry, I'm glad to say that the ministry has been called Environment and Water. I like that highlight because we have the opportunity to discuss the ongoing issues, the needs and challenges within water. I want to make it abundantly clear in this House that water will not be for sale to other jurisdictions from Alberta.

Ms Blakeman: Well, that doesn't mean they're not going to let it be for sale inside.

All right. Back to the same minister. Previous ministers of

environment have talked about and indeed the Premier has also talked about a consultation process happening on water. When would this consultation actually take place? There have been promises made since I was a starry-eyed optimist. When might it happen?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will be consulting with Albertans with regard to water allocation as we move forward in the coming months to make sure that the priorities of Albertans are heard first and foremost. My job will be to make sure that I'm hearing all of the issues across this province, what the issues, concerns related to water allocation in this province are, having a good and wholesome discussion with Albertans on that, and then bringing back through the process the conversation that we're having.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Still no timing.

Well, back to the same minister, then: given that a procession of previous ministers have paid lip service to a permanent wetlands policy, for which we prefer a no-net-loss policy, where is the minister placing this issue on her list of priorities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again on the question from the member, all of the issues with regard to the wetlands policy are being closely reviewed right now. I can let the hon. member know and the House know that we are getting very close with regard to the wetlands policy, bringing that through the process. We do have some differences of opinion with regard to no net loss, but we are going to work and have a further discussion as I have as a new minister to go and have those conversations with people. I would say that the wetlands policy will be coming through the process in a short period of time.

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

Royal Alberta Museum

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Arts and culture are a very important part of our society. Last spring it was announced that a new Royal Alberta Museum will be built in a downtown Edmonton location. Given that new ministers are now in place, there have been questions on whether the museum project is moving ahead. To the Minister of Infrastructure: is the project on hold?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm the project is still moving ahead. The new Royal Alberta Museum is an important project for the province and one that's been on the books for some time. It is a great opportunity, and we need to make it a reality. We're currently working with the successful proponent and working through some of the steps in the contract phase. I'm optimistic and confident that we'll begin construction in 2012 for a targeted completion in 2015.

Mr. Benito: My first supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. What are the next steps that need to be taken, then?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of things we need to work through still, and we're working with the proponent. One is that we need to make sure that the postal workers have swing space in the interim so that they have a place to move to while we demolish the building. My department is working on that. The

other is to work with the federal government and our federal minister of infrastructure to make sure the federal funding is forthcoming. We need to finalize those two things as we move through this contract process.

Mr. Benito: My second supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Culture and Community Services. What can Albertans expect to see with the new museum?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Basically, the true measure of a great museum is what's inside. We all know that the museum will double the space of what was there previously. About 10 million artifacts that are currently in storage will be displayed. We'll have a suite of galleries with natural history, wildlife, cultural history as well as a children's pavilion with, of course, a signature bug room. We've recently issued an RFQ to help us secure an exhibit design consortium, and we are working with them and moving ahead. It's very exciting.

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

Alleged Intimidation of Physicians

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are wondering how the new minister of health can oversee a public inquiry, which he never supported with the previous Premier, when he is now at the centre of a scandal himself pertaining to intimidation of doctors when he called P.J. White, the president of the Alberta Medical Association? How can you do your job, Mr. Minister, in terms of the controversy that surrounds you?

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

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last fall there was a lot of discussion in this House over many of the accusations that have been made by the opposition. With respect to the matter he mentioned, I made a very full statement in the House on November 29, 2010. It's well documented in *Hansard*.

The larger question and the allegation here that somehow myself or others would be involved in directing an inquiry is, frankly, absurd. Mr. Speaker, as I've said, we're fully committed to an independent inquiry. We'll have much more to say about that in the months to come.

Thank you.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, given that answer, through you to the minister of health, is the fox in the henhouse? In fact, you still have feathers in your mouth when it comes to what is going on in here. Will you apologize to doctors and the doctor in this Assembly, who are standing up for Albertans?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the hon. member and to this House, I think there are some statements that you simply don't dignify with a response, and that would be one, sir.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, given that the feathers got in the way of the words, I'll ask him one more time. Will he apologize to the doctor in this House and to all Alberta doctors that you have played a role in intimidating relative to the health care of all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness?
The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pine beetle problem is not isolated to Alberta but is a cross-Canada issue that is now reaching epidemic proportions in our national parks and, in particular, in Jasper national park in my constituency of West Yellowhead. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is the current status of Alberta's fight against mountain pine beetle?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've just completed aerial surveys to determine the spread of the beetles that were hatched last summer, and I'm pleased to report that in the southwestern portion of the province things look good. We've got no significant new populations there and no new in-flights from British Columbia. I'm concerned to report that the situation is more serious in west-central Alberta. There are very large populations surviving there, and that will be the focus of our efforts this coming summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. How are we engaging the federal government in our campaign against beetles in Alberta and especially in Jasper and Banff national parks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The efforts that we've undertaken on our provincial lands we're responsible for. We've worked very closely with the Canadian Forest Service and their tremendous research capacity. They've brought significant tools to bear in our fight against the pine beetle. We have discussions to take to determine whether we have a joint role within the parks, if there is any way Alberta can assist. I'm sure we'll find some synergies with the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. The forest industry and the Alberta government are spending millions of dollars to fight this infestation. Is Alberta asking the federal government to provide funding in our fight against these beetles?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've not yet had the opportunity to discuss the funding issue with my federal counterpart. I will say, though, that the federal government already has been at the table with funding, significant amounts of funding, in dealing with the environmental impacts of the outbreak. As I said, we have now an issue within the national parks – I'm sure the federal government will be concerned about that – and that will underline for us that this is not just a provincial but a national issue, and we'll be speaking to the minister soon.

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

International Trade Representatives

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were appalled earlier this month when the newly minted Minister of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations disregarded open and honest competition and unilaterally plucked Gary Mar into his

latest pork-barrel position in Hong Kong. To the Minister of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations: will the minister table the evaluatory report card of Gary Mar's performance in Washington that eliminated the need for considering other candidates for the Hong Kong office?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise and take a question from the hon. member. We had an opportunity to position a candidate in the Hong Kong office to look after our Asian offices. We were very pleased to surface a candidate and took advantage of that.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To the same minister: given the importance of the Keystone pipeline and foreign trade, how can the minister continue to favour government friends in our Washington office?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, our Washington office continues to be staffed and operated at full capacity. We have a fellow by the name of David Manning who is doing work for us there on an ongoing basis. Whether it's the Keystone XL project, low-carbon fuel standard, or a variety of border trade issues that we have, we're right on top of it in Washington.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm worried about the being right on top of it, what that connotes in this province.

Given the Premier's promise for openness and transparency in government, will the minister stop political patronage and commit to an open and competitive process for the appointment of Alberta's international trade representatives?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, what I would suggest is that finding the absolute best candidate for the job is paramount. Whether that entails a competition or that involves an appointment, that is the process that we will use.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays

Community Restorative Justice

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are all for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. By all accounts the Alberta community restorative justice grant is a highly successful program that, unfortunately, was cut in the 2011-12 budget. After much public criticism this summer funding was found to restore the grants for these kinds of programs. Could the minister explain the flip-flop?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The previous Solicitor General, the minister responsible for Sustainable Resource Development, met in September with the Restorative Justice Association board and advised that the funding would be reinstated. I fully support this commitment. The request to relevant organizations went out in October. I'm looking forward, actually, to hearing some of the applications back under the restorative justice program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental: how can this minister claim funding was found from within the department when this cut should not have happened in the first place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Victims of Crime Act, which I believe was Bill 15 of this year, gives the office of the Solicitor General authority to make grants to areas involving victims, of course, and that includes the restorative justice program. There are some guidelines set under this, and we'll follow the guidelines, but I'm confident that this program's continuation is in the best interests of the victims of crime.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, how can this minister ensure that the victims of crime fund is used appropriately and is not a slush fund? What controls are in place to ensure that this important fund is spent responsibly?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the Victims of Crime Act stipulates clear guidelines as to where funding under this act can actually go. We will be following that. It's not a slush fund. It's designed to support the victims of crime. That's why it's called the Victims of Crime Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Emergency Room Wait Times

(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In September 2010 Dr. Paul Parks, president of emergency medicine in the Alberta Medical Association, warned Alberta Health Services and the former health minister of the potential catastrophic collapse of timely emergency care delivery in the upcoming months. Over a year later the emergency room physicians at Alberta Health Services website are saying little has changed. To the minister: how does the minister explain the continued failure to meet your own targets?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Felix Soibelman, who is the current chair of the section of emergency medicine at the Alberta Medical Association, has already been in touch with me. We discussed the meeting that they held over this past weekend and are arranging to meet together with Alberta Health Services and other stakeholders who are key to addressing this problem in the coming week.

Dr. Swann: So a non-answer if I've ever heard one, Mr. Speaker.

The minister says they're trying to meet all seniors' needs at the same time. Well, has he learned nothing from the H1N1 epidemic? You cannot meet all seniors' needs at all times. You have to prioritize the high-risk people first. When are you going to do that?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the question was asked and answered earlier this afternoon. The fact of the matter is that we are experiencing a surge in emergency department wait times in the last month. However, that is consistent with the experience in the last few years. If you look at our year-over-year performance over the last few years, those waiting times have come down. Are they good enough yet? Absolutely not. Can we do better, and do we need to work with stakeholders in order to find the right strategies, including adding continuing care spaces and expanding primary care and family care clinics? Yes, we do, and we're doing that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, with emergency rooms at or over capacity and flu season looming, will this minister now formally begin assessing patient outcomes, or are you going to wait for courageous ER physicians to again start collecting the data for you?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am not a physician, and I am not in a position to stand here and comment on how or when or under what circumstances we assess patient outcomes. What I can say is that Alberta Health Services is working very closely with physicians and with nurses and with other professionals to identify what those outcomes would need to be. We're watching the situation very, very carefully.

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

Aboriginal and Métis Relations

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations. Now that aboriginal relations is no longer a stand-alone ministry, how can we be sure that First Nation issues remain a priority of the government of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member for the question, indeed an important question that's been raised over the last couple of weeks. Certainly, the intergovernmental – government to government – relationship that we have with aboriginal nations, communities, and Métis in our province is extraordinarily important. I believe that it's been positioned so that the linkage with our federal partners, with the other ministries that we're going to work together with is ideally positioned. Important to remember, too, that all of the resources and budget are still within the department.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what about your relationships with the Métis leaders and their communities?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, just this morning I met with the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs, and I had an opportunity to speak with all of the chiefs, elders, and interested parties from throughout the province. We had a discussion about their vision for what we're going to be doing, going ahead together as a government and government, and I had an opportunity to share a little bit about myself and my interest and passion for outcomes in this area. So we're already dialoguing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, you mentioned that you met with the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs today. Firstly, does that include the Métis chiefs as well? And could you give us an update on how things went and what issues were addressed in that meeting?

Mr. Dallas: It doesn't include Métis, Mr. Speaker. That is another group that we'll be meeting with in the very near future. One of the things that I wanted to speak to is the importance of our protocol agreement and the fact that we've indicated that we're

prepared to conduct a protocol meeting this fall. So we very much look forward to getting together with the grand chiefs, the vice-chiefs, ministers from the government and immediately engaging in a dialogue. We have initiated and are continuing our discussions with the Métis people on important considerations.

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

Children's Services

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Government has gone through many significant reorganizations in the last few years, and one of the most dramatic that we have seen recently is, of course, the creation of the new Human Services ministry, a superministry as some would call it. It has been expressed to me by my constituents that we run the risk that services to very vulnerable children will be lost in this very big entity. To the Minister of Human Services: can you explain how these valuable services will be preserved for these children?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's really at the core of the concept of the Ministry of Human Services that we need to have a consolidated social policy framework which ensures that we start with the children. We make sure that the children are protected when they need protection, that their families are supported when they need support, that there's ability there to support adults to get job training when they need it so that they can access a good job, that the labour standards are in place. It all really does come together very strongly in a social policy framework which centres around children.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can you assure the House, Mr. Minister, that as you work through this very significant reorganization, that the service levels will be maintained at the highest levels, that these vulnerable young Albertans can look to the highest level of services from you and your officials?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, just because there's a reorganization doesn't mean that the people that are on the ground have changed in any way. Those groups are still working, those people are still working, as we work to bring together the things that we can create with greater synergy and as we look to see what things we need to do better.

One of the critical pieces is that we have good people at the front end of the system. We need to empower them to use their judgment, and we need to make sure that they have the skills to be able to use that judgment in the most appropriate way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: No. That's fine, Mr. Speaker.
Thank you.

The Speaker: That concludes the question period today, hon. members. Twenty-one members participated, with 123 questions and responses. That's a very large number, and I appreciate that. I want to say that I've looked forward to this question period for a long period of time.

Maybe there are going to be some new beginnings as well. I want to congratulate the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Premier for the brevity and the clarity in their questions and in their responses. By way of your examples today I hope that will

set the tone for all other hon. members in raising questions and in responding to questions as we move into the future.

Secondly, I only received one note from one member, basically pointing out that members continue to use preambles in their second and third questions, and there are four or five members who actually did that today. You'll be guarded in your own comments and you'll have self-discipline with respect to this, I'm sure, as we go into the future.

I'm pleased that the leader of the Wildrose Party is in the Speaker's gallery today. This has been one of the better behaved sessions we've had with her members in the House, so I'd invite you to come back each and every day to assist the Speaker in his role in the Assembly in keeping decorum in place. [Disturbance in the gallery]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Order in the gallery! You're not part of these proceedings.

The Speaker: Well, why not? It's the 24th day of October. We're one week from Halloween, so let's get into the spirit.

Members' Statements

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

20th Anniversary of Ukraine's Independence

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two decades ago, on August 24, 1991, in a historic move the Parliament of Ukraine established Ukraine as an independent, sovereign, and democratic nation. Ukraine's road to democracy was not an easy one and was achieved after centuries of struggle filled with countless political and cultural repressions.

I'm proud to say that Canada was the first western nation, Mr. Speaker, to recognize Ukraine's independence, and our country continues to be a strong supporter of Ukraine's democratization. The future for Ukraine is unwritten, and I along with others are hopeful and optimistic that Ukraine will continue on the path to freedom.

Mr. Speaker, I rose earlier to introduce and welcome to the Assembly representatives from Alberta's Ukrainian community, here in recognition of the 20th anniversary of Ukraine's independence. It was my honour and privilege along with the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to recognize and participate in the important milestone celebration hosted by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Edmonton branch, on August 28, 2011.

I commend the leadership of this important organization and its member organizations for their steadfast support to ensure that the cultural, political, and economic contributions of Ukrainian settlement and people in our province are recognized and cherished across generations. Truly this is a living example of the Alberta spirit, which is exemplified in many communities across our great province, including within the city of Edmonton. Please accept my heartfelt thanks for adding immeasurably to our city and great province.

Mr. Speaker, this also marks the 120th anniversary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada, and I urge our government to continue to stand strong with the Ukrainian people. Best wishes to all Albertans of Ukrainian heritage who celebrated the 20th anniversary of Ukraine's independence and settlement in our country. God bless Ukraine. God bless Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Human Services Ministry

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Superministry or megamistake? Attributing the term "super" to the new Ministry of Human Services provides little assurance when applied in the Alberta context. A \$1.3 billion superboard cost overrun, the loss of local decision-making, governance infighting, ministerial revolving-door changes without improved results, longer surgical waiting lists, increased emergency waiting times, and large CEO severances for work not done are just a few of the superfailures associated with this multiflawed reorganizational attempt. Whose bright idea was it to superglue the two most spotted ministries of employment and children and youth services, with the highest combined casualty rate and least productivity in resolving human crises, into a megaministry?

Historically these ministries have failed to protect children and youth, particularly aboriginal children in care. They have neither ensured safe job sites for all working Albertans, nor have they guaranteed that families of workers injured or killed on the job would be fairly dealt with by the Workers' Compensation Board. Just as two wrongs don't make a right, how can the amalgamation of the two least productive ministries solve the problem of the inadequate provision and protection of human services?

A preferential solution would be in adapting Manitoba's Jordan's principle precedent, which ensures that the first level of government, whether federal or provincial, to be made aware of a service provision requirement is responsible for its successful resolution. Substitute "ministry" for "level of government." Ensure that regardless of which ministry receives the cry for help, it oversees the case through to its successful conclusion, not by ping-ponging the person requiring services from ministry to ministry nor by putting them on a super waiting list and certainly not by bonusing front-line caseworkers to arbitrarily reduce their most complex files. Instead, provide the front-line gatekeepers with the necessary training, support, salary, and authority to properly serve our most vulnerable.

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

Priority Printing Ltd.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know and indeed as everyone in this Assembly is aware by now, I am particularly fond of the slogan It's All in Calder. I'd like to talk about the businesses and people who are unique to my constituency.

Earlier I introduced four people from the company Priority Printing. This summer company owner Tim Downey and his staff celebrated 25 years in business, and what a remarkable business it is. Priority Printing is the company that prints, collates, folds, packages, and ships all of the documentation that we use to keep this Assembly functioning. Tim and his staff are keen business-people. Everyone knows full well that, frankly, the only risk to their business would be for us to stop talking. In other words, Mr. Speaker, it is reasonably certain that they will prosper for the foreseeable future. Because there is no other group of people with quite as great an interest in the things we say in this House, it seems only appropriate that after 25 years of reading about everyone and everything else in *Hansard*, they should have their opportunity to read about themselves in *Hansard*.

The staff at Priority can tell you exactly who said what and how many times they said it. They give you, Mr. Speaker, useful data like how many pages were printed, how much all of those pages weighed, and virtually anything else about turning the things we

say into the things that we read in this Legislature. It is important and interesting stuff.

When I toured the plant, I was surprised and happy to be reacquainted with Joanne Safron, who is the younger sister of a schoolmate of mine, Rhonda Grywachski, that I had the pleasure of spending 12 years with. I always enjoy meeting people, someone like Joanne from so long ago, and it's even more fun when you find out, Mr. Speaker, that they're keeping an eye on you to this very day, much like her sister used to do so very long ago. Say hi to Rhonda for me, Joanne.

Thank you.

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

Grande Prairie Accident Victims

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great sadness that I rise today to comment on the terrible vehicle accident that occurred this weekend in Grande Prairie, which claimed the lives of four teenage boys and left one boy in critical yet stable condition. The loss of Matthew Deller, Vincent Stover, Walter Borden-Wilkins, and Tanner Hildebrand has left the community of Grande Prairie heartbroken and in a period of mourning.

Tragic accidents like this one are always difficult to comprehend as they affect many different people on many levels. That is why it is so important for the people of Alberta to provide comfort and support to those who have been greatly affected by this devastating incident. Mr. Speaker, our sincerest condolences go to the families of these young boys. As well, we stand behind Zach Judd, who is the lone survivor, and his family through these difficult times.

To the members of the Grande Prairie community, the Grande Prairie composite high school staff and students, and to the Warriors football team: we offer you our thoughts and prayers as you cope with this tragedy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

2:50

Great Kids Awards

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise in the Assembly today to congratulate Alberta's Great Kids. Our province is full of inspiring children and youth, who make a positive and lasting difference for others in their own special way at home, at school, and in their communities.

This past weekend at the 12th annual Great Kids awards ceremony in Edmonton the Minister of Human Services, the Hon. Dave Hancock, recognized 16 outstanding young people from across Alberta between the ages of five and 18 for their generosity, courage, and strong spirit. Their activities included volunteering, mentoring, and fundraising initiatives.

Award recipients were selected by a committee of community members and government staff. One example would be 16-year-old Dyllan Duperron from Valleyview, Alberta. In early 2011 he ran from the Jack Ady cancer centre in Lethbridge to the Grande Prairie cancer centre over the course of eight weeks to raise more than \$15,000 for the Alberta Cancer Foundation in honour of his uncle, who passed away from cancer.

Joined by family and friends at the Fantasyland Hotel, each Great Kid received a laptop computer from IBM and attractions passes from West Edmonton Mall. More than 120 children and youth were nominated for the award by their teachers, parents, neighbours, and peers.

Alberta's Great Kids stand out as positive role models for all young people and people of all ages. I encourage everyone to visit greatkids.alberta.ca to read about the 2011 Great Kids program. Their stories of achievement and resilience make all of us proud. Alberta's future is bright thanks to the incredible talents and promise of our children and youth.

Thank you.

Slave Lake Fire

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, May 15, 2011, is a day my constituents and I will never forget. That day the forest fire east of Slave Lake jumped highway 88 and destroyed about 40 per cent of the town, the MD of Lesser Slave River, and Sawridge First Nation, leaving some 300-plus families homeless. The next day a second fire south of Slave Lake jumped highway 2, striking Wagner, Widewater, Canyon Creek, and Assineau and burning many more homes. Within a few days nine jurisdictions in my constituency had declared a state of local emergency, with fires threatening Red Earth Creek, Gift Lake, Atikameg, Loon River, Cadotte Lake, Chisholm, and East Prairie.

Although this disaster is over and there are still residual effects today, I want to recognize the individuals, groups, and organizations who were involved in our unforgettable series of events. To our volunteer firemen, SRD, RCMP and peace officers, EMTs, and all the emergency responders from the surrounding jurisdictions and around the province: thank you.

Words cannot describe our thanks to the Red Cross workers and all the other volunteers who helped clothe, feed, and provide short-term financial assistance during and after the crisis.

To the citizens of the region, thank you for checking up on your neighbours to ensure everyone was safe and able to leave as you carried out an orderly evacuation of some 10,000 people, not knowing what you were driving into or through. You are my heroes.

To the people of Edmonton, Peace River, St. Isadore, Wabasca, High Prairie, Valleyview, Swan Hills, Whitecourt, Barrhead, Westlock, and Athabasca, you opened your arms and homes and facilities to provide emergency food and shelter on such short notice. You make me proud to be an Albertan.

I can't forget the tireless efforts of the employees of the POC in Edmonton, who immediately took action to guide, advise, and direct the overall management of the emergency. You worked 24/7. Thank you.

To the elected officials of the town, the MD, the First Nation, and all your employees who dealt with the crisis and are currently working on rebuilding our community: thank you.

My constituents and I are so grateful for the leadership demonstrated by then Premier Ed Stelmach and his cabinet in establishing a DM committee to help the elected officials deal with this disaster and providing much-needed assistance so fast. Big thanks.

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

Calgary Small Business Week

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. October 17 to 21 was Calgary Small Business Week. This week provided small businesses with opportunities to highlight and celebrate the success of small businesses in Alberta and in my constituency, which is home to about 200 small businesses. This Small Business Week also included a trade show, keynote luncheon speakers, and an awards celebration, which I had the pleasure of attending.

Small business is the backbone of Alberta's business sector, especially in Calgary. In 2010 95 per cent of all businesses in Calgary were classified as small, and they had the highest number of small businesses per capita of all the major Canadian cities. But despite these impressive figures challenges arise. Obstacles need to be overcome, and everyone could use a little help now and then. Alberta recognizes this and believes in supporting these growing businesses as best we can. This is why we have many outlets and services for small businesses in Alberta to take advantage of.

For instance, the government of Alberta has partnered with the government of Canada to offer Business Link, a website full of information, contacts, and tools for up-and-coming businesses in Alberta. We also offer the Alberta tax advantage. We have some of the lowest business taxes in Canada, allowing small businesses to get on their feet and grow. The Alberta government provides numerous grants and funds to various sectors of industry, from agriculture to science and technology.

This is a great province to start a business in, and this became very apparent to me when it took me three months to find an office space in my constituency when I first got elected.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta supports our small businesses in many, many ways, and in turn they support us, helping our province grow and keeping our economy strong.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on a Standing Order 15 motion.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 15(2) I am raising a point of privilege, that in November and December 2010 the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek interfered with the ability of members of this House to fulfill their duties when as Minister of Health and Wellness he made certain statements regarding the source of materials contained in a document titled Alberta's Health Legislation Moving Forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Pursuant to Standing Order 30, having provided your office the appropriate notice and having the required copies to be made for distribution, I wish to request of the House that upon completion of the daily Routine I be allowed to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly in order that the House may debate a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the future direction and place and opportunity of Alberta in Canada and the world given the current economic uncertainty in Europe, the state of the U.S. economy, the importance of Asian growth and markets, and the impact of same on Alberta and Albertans.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the benefit of the House the appropriate number of copies of a memorandum which I wrote to yourself on October 20 and titled House Leaders Agreement, which deals with understandings that were made between House leaders relative to the debate that I just gave notice of this afternoon and the time parameters which we will be asking the House to agree to later on.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first consists of five notebooks which were distributed this past week to supporters of the Alberta Association for Community Living at their fundraising breakfast at the Palliser Fairmont hotel, which the member for Calgary-Buffalo and I attended. The message on the cover by George Bernard Shaw states, "I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can." AACL is frequently both the first hope and the last resort for disabled Alberta families.

My second tabling is the program for a fantastic, award-winning one-man play put on by Ghost River Theatre entitled *The Highest Step in the World*, which is currently running at Calgary's Pumphouse Theatre, upon whose stage I have thrice trod in Storybook Theatre productions.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to have the opportunity in tablings to table three pieces of correspondence that I have received from my constituents. The first is from Edith Greene, who currently resides in Lions Village, which is a life lease facility. She is writing to me to ask the Assembly to please move forward on creating life lease legislation as soon as possible.

The second tabling I have is from Bev Burke, who for 27 years produced the English Express newspaper. She was writing to thank me for my efforts but also to remind the government that not all of the pieces that English Express used to cover have been picked up by other providers of the service.

Finally, an e-mail from Ron Howard, who is most vexed that every time there is a slight, small, tiny increase in seniors' benefits, there is a corresponding clawback in some way, shape, or form, in this particular instance in his subsidized rent.

Thank you very much.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(7) says: "at 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly."

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's the first day back. I would ask the House for unanimous consent to suspend Standing Order 7(7) and allow the Routine to continue until completed.

The Speaker: All right. There's a request for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7). I will ask two questions. All members in favour of the waiver request, please say aye. Is anyone opposed? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, your plea has been heard.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I appreciate that, hon. member. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter dated October 19, last Wednesday, to the chair of the Alberta Utilities Commission from the current Minister of Energy regarding the four applications for critical transmission infrastructure.

The second tabling I have is a letter dated October 6, 2011, and it's from a distinguished resident of Strathcona county, John C. Murray, to the hon. Premier regarding the Keystone pipeline project.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. If I could be allowed to table on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, I'd appreciate it.

The Speaker: Absolutely. Proceed.

Ms Blakeman: I have eight tablings that support the questions that he asked in question period today. I'm going to go through them as quickly as I can. One is e-mails, that were obtained through freedom of information, showing Energy ministry officials corresponding with Williams Energy and their lobbyist prior to the announcement.

The second is the Energy ministry news release announcing those changes to the IEEP.

The third is the Williams Energy news release announcing their partnership and how pleased they were with the government announcement. The drafting of this was actually done prior to the changes.

The fourth is the Williams Energy capital guidance filing from February 2011. This document was part of their planning process; therefore, they were working on it well before the date.

Fifth, NOVA Chemicals' news release on their partnership with Williams Energy in which they credit the IEEP with being instrumental in the partnership deal.

The order in council of March 23, 2011, approving the changes to the IEEP.

The provincial government news release announcing the creation of the Competitiveness Council, which recommended the changes to the IEEP.

Finally, the entry in the lobbyists registry showing that an individual, Walentin Mirosh, was a designated lobbyist for NOVA and was eventually taken off the lobbyists registry prior to his appointment to the Alberta Competitiveness Council.

Thank you for your patience, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document titled Proposed Alberta Health Act, a document outlining options for privatization of health care by this government, including the tabling of contentious regulations involving privatization of health care and delaying them until fall 2012. I have the correct number to table with you.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, as required by Standing Order 114, I'm pleased to present you with the 2010 annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office and the 2010 annual report of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Alberta branch. The LAO annual report includes financial statements for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2010, and highlights the activities and achievements of the LAO for the calendar year ended December 31, 2010.

Privilege Misleading the House

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the Standing Order 15 application. Now, just in looking at the application in terms of what you provided to me earlier today and by brief comment, I understand that the comments will be made with respect to the former hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. That's correct. Okay. That gentleman is not here today. He advised me late last week that he was attending to a family matter.

As this is an application for a motion of privilege, I would view that to be the most sacred of all applications. The presence of a

member, as per what our standing orders say, should be reviewed as part of this. So if the intent today with your application is to basically move a point of privilege against an hon. member, that's one thing. If it's simply to give notice, recognizing that when I had a brief discussion this morning with your leader, I advised him that the hon. member would not be here today nor tomorrow – I know that in a privilege the intent is to move it as quickly as possible, so there should be no delay in terms of when you receive certain information and you want to make a motion. So if the intent today is to move it but without major argument on it, I think that in all likelihood, in fairness – well, not knowing what you're going to say, perhaps I should just wait until I hear what you say, but I may be intervening as well.

Please proceed.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding from your discussions with the leader of the NDP caucus is exactly what you've just stated in that I understood that you would most likely be asking that this matter be deferred to when the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek was back in the House. Without question, the nature of our concern revolves around simply our view that in that member's mischaracterizing the source of the information that is contained in the document Alberta's Health Legislation: Moving Forward, he interfered with the ability of members of this Assembly to hold the appropriate authors of that document accountable for the public policy decisions and directions that were implicit in that document.

My understanding, based on your discussions with the leader of the NDP caucus, is that further conversations or arguments around this point of privilege would be deferred until that member returned to the House. So based on that discussion, I understand that I will get into more detail about the nature of our concerns when that member is present.

The Speaker: I appreciate that, hon. member, and in fairness, I think, recognizing Standing Order 15(4), which also states:

If the Member whose conduct is called into question is not present, the matter shall be deferred to the next day that the Member is present unless the Speaker rules that, in the circumstances, the matter may be dealt with in the Member's absence.

Further, 15(3) states:

If the Speaker is of the opinion that the matter may not be fairly dealt with at that time, the Speaker may defer debate on the matter to a time when he or she determines it may be fairly dealt with.

My understanding from a conversation last week with the hon. member, the former Minister of Health and Wellness, is that he was away on important family matters and would not be returning till the House reconvenes on November 21.

You have given notice. It will be on the record that you want to make an application for this, and it will be one of the first orders of business after conclusion of the Routine when we reconvene. If I understand, it is November 21. Would that be fine?

Ms Notley: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm satisfied with that outcome.

The Speaker: Okay. I appreciate that.

Government House Leader, did you want to make a comment on this?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. If I may, I would also note that the letter to yourself, a copy of which had been provided to us, is excessively vague with respect to the nature of the documents. I'm wondering if it might be appropriate to ask that the particular

documents being referred to in the letter also be provided so that a proper response might be available to the member.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as the House leader may not have noticed, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood just tabled that document. The document itself is one which specifically outlines a number of issues, clearly drafted by public officials within the ministry of health, shared with the minister of health, and dated well before the public hearings which previously the minister of health had suggested were the source of the information that was in the subsequent document, which was the subject of his statements last fall, last November. So it is an analysis of the document which the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood tabled today, which contradicts very clearly the statements made in this Assembly last November.

3:10

Emergency Debate

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. Government House Leader, on your Standing Order 30 application.

Alberta's Place in the Global Economy

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to move pursuant to Standing Order 30:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the future direction, place, and opportunity of Alberta in Canada and the world given the current economic uncertainty in Europe, the state of the U.S. economy, the importance of Asian growth and markets, and the impact of same on Alberta and Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, we have requested the opportunity to bring forward a Standing Order 30, which is to allow the discussion of a matter of urgent public importance. Nothing could be more important at this moment in time to Albertans than to hear from their leadership, the Premier and the leaders of the opposition parties in this House, about issues that concern them because Alberta trades out into the world. We are a trading province. We sell our products, whether they be oil and gas, agriculture, or forestry, into world markets, and the world markets are in an incredible state of disarray.

Nothing could be more important to the future of the province right now than to hear from our leaders with respect to that direction of Alberta and Alberta's place and what we can do in the context of what is happening in the global climate. It's particularly important, Mr. Speaker, because both the leadership of the government and the leadership of the Official Opposition have changed since we last sat, and the province has been party to and participants in leadership processes to select new leadership, to select new direction, and to have that new leadership explain that new direction to Albertans and clearly enunciate a way forward.

It couldn't be more important to Albertans right now to hear what that way forward would be given that seniors and those approaching retirement are concerned about their investments; our farmers, who have just had one of their best years ever, are concerned about the ability to sell; and the forestry industry is still in a state of flux. All of those things that we do in this province trade out into the world, and our economy, our livelihood, and our quality of life depend on that.

We have new leadership in the province: a new Premier, as you so eloquently pointed out today, and a new leader of the Official Opposition, as you eloquently pointed out earlier today. Nothing could be more urgent for this House to discuss than the future direction of the province given the state of the climate of the world.

I would also point out, Mr. Speaker, that by my memo to you of October 20 House leaders have agreed that this is an appropriate way to frame a discussion for this afternoon in this House and that all parties, therefore, would seemingly request. I have provided you with the memo, and I can assure you – I have e-mails from each of the other House leaders indicating that the memo accurately describes our conversation and agreement – that we would agree, then, as House leaders that this matter should go forward in this manner.

I would just end by saying, Mr. Speaker, that if, indeed, you and the House agree that we should proceed, we would then be asking you to request unanimous consent with respect to the speaking times and the end-of-day standing orders so that we can conform to the terms of the agreement with respect to allowing the Premier, the Opposition House Leader, and other leaders to speak to this very urgent matter.

The Speaker: Just a second, hon. member. The rules clearly state that under Standing Order 30(2), one "Member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as [the Speaker] considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate" and then rule on it. As I have heard the submission, I've also had access now to documents that basically confirm that leaders of the other parties in the Assembly have at least agreed to this.

In terms of argument with respect to urgency, they can be very limited. I'm quite prepared to move this along. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I would like to say about the government's Standing Order 30 application is that, frankly, I'm not over the moon about the use of the Standing Order 30, particularly the possible precedents that can be taken from this.

I am particularly disappointed in the substitution or subsuming of private members' business, the pre-empting of private members' business for government business. The government has more than sufficient control of the agenda. I will state very firmly on behalf of my caucus and other opposition caucuses that we were not in favour of the adjournment. Our agreement was very much limited in how the presentations would proceed and the time limits that we would honour given those presentations. We have agreed to that. We will stand behind it.

I really ask the government, with all the parliamentary tools available at their disposal, to find a replacement time for the private members' business which has been lost today. I would like to see it recovered. We don't get a lot of private members' business time in this House, and I would not like to end this session and this year with one less day than we were entitled to.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep this very brief, from what you said.

We did agree, as the House leader pointed out, to the business of the day and adjourning the regular business to talk about and debate the issue of the world financial crisis and some of the issues related to it and how it will affect Alberta and what we can do going forward to lessen its impact on us and so forth.

I also want to make it clear that we did not as a caucus agree at all to this disrespectful, frankly, two-day session in the Legislature. It needs to be very clear that we feel that this was a huge slap in the face of democracy and something that, specifically with this Premier and her record of advocating for democracy overseas,

I wouldn't expect from her. She needs to conduct herself better in that regard.

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. members, the chair is prepared to rule on whether the request for leave for this motion to proceed is in order under Standing Order 30. Notice of the application was received in the Speaker's office on Friday, October 21, at 11:08 a.m., so the time limit of two hours prior to the start of the session has been met.

The chair wants to say that this is a unique moment for the Assembly and for the province of Alberta because there is not only a new Premier but a new Leader of the Official Opposition as well.

It is clear to the chair that there is no opportunity given the matters on the Order Paper for these individuals to address the Assembly, let alone the province of Alberta, on the current global economic condition. The chair has the duty as your Speaker to ensure that the Assembly retains its position as the focus for debate by the democratically elected representatives in this province.

Furthermore – and this is very important – the fact that House leaders have come to an agreement concerning the need for this discussion is a clear indication of the will of the Assembly, which a Speaker can take into consideration. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, states at page 695:

The Speaker may take into account the general wish of the House to have an emergency debate and grant a request for an emergency debate.

It goes on to say:

Similarly, the Chair has periodically allowed an emergency debate on an issue which was not necessarily urgent within the meaning conferred by the rule, but was one on which the House of Commons timetable prevented any discussion in a timely manner.

The chair is of the view that this quotation reflects the unique situation that exists today. Accordingly, the chair finds the application to be in order and shall put the question. Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Okay. Having done that, we now have a successful Standing Order 30 application. However, there has to be a whole series of rules that now have to be waived. The debate in the matter put forward by the Government House Leader will proceed, but in order to apply the desired rules agreed to by the House leaders, there has to be support by the members of the Assembly. Before the debate proceeds, everyone needs to be clear about the rules.

3:20

Under the House leaders' agreement – and I'm assuming that every member in this Assembly has seen such agreement, has a copy of such agreement, is cognizant of the details of such agreement, but I'll just repeat these very briefly – the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition are entitled to speak for one hour each. The representative of the Wildrose caucus, the leader of the New Democratic caucus, and the Alberta caucus representative are entitled to 30 minutes each. If any of these individuals does not use his or her allotted time, then after all these individuals have spoken, another member of the respective caucus may speak in the same rotation, but the cumulative total must not exceed the time limits just mentioned.

If everyone uses the allotted time, then the Assembly will continue past the normal adjournment hour of 6 p.m., stipulated in

standing orders 3(1) and 4(2). Under the House leaders' agreement the debate would continue until the speaking times have been reached, which could be three and one-half hours after the Premier starts speaking. Furthermore, the allocation of time departs from the time limits for speaking found in Standing Order 30(5). Also, there is a limitation on the number of members who will be speaking.

The chair will thus ask two questions to cover all the procedural issues associated with conducting this unique, historic debate. The rulings of such will have no precedent in future discussion by future Speakers in future Assemblies.

There will be two questions, as I said. Is there unanimous consent to waive the necessary standing orders in order to conduct the emergency debate as indicated in the House leaders' agreement of October 20, 2011? All those in favour, please say yes. If a member is opposed, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: All right. Let's see. Three and a half hours from now will take us through. Clerk, you will keep time. Any time left over in the one-hour allocation for the Premier – if the Premier speaks for 60 minutes, well, then, that's it. If the Premier speaks for 50 minutes, then after the Leader of the Official Opposition, the leader of the Wildrose caucus, the leader of the ND caucus, the independent member, a government member can come back in the rotation as we go through.

Hon. Madam Premier, just before you begin, we haven't said "Orders of the Day," but we can have coffee and other refreshments brought in.

Ms Redford: Well, good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, ministers, hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly, and Albertans. It is an honour to stand before you today for the first time as Alberta's Premier. I'm so proud of our home, a great province that is doubly blessed. We have an astounding wealth of resources, more than enough to sustain our families and crown our communities, and we have an extraordinary natural heritage, timelessly beautiful landscapes that stir the soul and linger in the mind's eye. Albertans understand that we have the best of both worlds. That is why we take such a fierce pride in our province. I know that for each of us and for generations to come, we can leave Alberta better than we found it.

I requested that the Legislative Assembly's ordinary business be adjourned in order to speak to Albertans. I believe it is important to keep them informed about their government's plan for Alberta's future in the face of ongoing global economic difficulties. This is not just about the need to build prosperity. It's about anticipating our province's needs amid great uncertainty in the world around us.

This government has two basic responsibilities. We must shield Alberta from the hazards of challenging times in which we live, and we must help the province adapt to make the most of the opportunities that these same challenges offer, rising where others falter. We must keep the economy free and unfettered. We must maintain steady job growth and provide Albertans with the opportunities that they expect. We must offer high-quality and far-reaching public services, and we must preserve the province's finances. We must define where we are, where we are going, and where we want to be in a fast-changing and unpredictable world. With this government's guidance we will work together to strengthen Alberta and prepare it to overcome every obstacle.

Today I want to explain what we are doing about our place in the world in light of these circumstances. I also want to explain

this government's stand so you can understand what we have set out to do and why. Understanding is the key to effective co-operation, and only close collaboration in this Assembly will see Alberta safely through. We need a session built on thoughtful legislation and constructive debate, one that creates sensible solutions to improve Alberta's quality of life. The decisions we make together now will shape the province for a long time to come.

We have all heard of the crises in Europe. Debt is the trap that has caught so many struggling governments. Debt has proven the death of countless dreams. Many European countries are struggling with debt burdens that in some cases exceed a hundred per cent of GDP. Those unfortunate nations spent too much and took in too little. Now they are faced with hard choices: raise taxes and kill jobs, cut spending and devastate the social safety net, or both. Their citizens are paying the price. The homes they loved have changed beyond all recognition.

Alberta has no net debt. In fact, we have \$5,700 in assets per person and the highest credit rating available. We have the lowest overall taxes in Canada. We have disciplined spending priorities and no long-term debt. We are blessed with a strong economy built on a powerful industrial base and a young population. We have one of the greatest energy sectors in the world. We are better off than many other places, and we have a future anyone else would envy, one this government will work to make better still.

But we can't take this for granted. Good fortune will not fall into our laps because we ask for it or think we're entitled to it. We have to earn it. We can stay safe from these threats. This government will protect and strengthen our province. We will make it better. We will make the tough decisions. We will spend wisely and save intelligently, managing our finances to protect future Albertans from debt. We will introduce the necessary reforms to make sure that this province keeps growing. There is no other way.

It is normal to want the good times to last forever, and it is natural to hope that larger jurisdictions will get things back on track. This is the sort of thinking we must avoid because in this day and age we are all defined not by our hopes and wants but by our actions. To prosper, we must seize opportunity wherever we find it. We must open up new avenues of growth. We can become the lead driver in North America's economy.

The United States is and will remain our biggest customer, but their recovery is slow. They are struggling with crushing debt and political divisions on a number of fronts. We must search for new partners in foreign markets. Our prosperity depends on our ability to promote Alberta on a world stage. We must be bold. If we do this right, we can become the world's preferred supplier in food, energy, and innovation and realize the incredible future that comes with this status. But, above all, we must be disciplined, watching closely and working together to insulate Alberta from harm.

Our success at home and abroad is ultimately driven by people. The government will make maintaining Alberta's quality of life its highest priority for Albertans. We will continue to help Albertans excel because a strong economy depends on stronger people, and strong people depend on essential services that keep up with their needs. This means supporting a strong social network to protect our most vulnerable and to support families. We are committed to maintaining programs and services for vulnerable Albertans while ensuring long-term program sustainability.

Nonprofits have a major role to play. Albertans are passionate volunteers, and my government will support them in their efforts to reach out to those who need it most, especially during difficult economic times. Over the past four years the government has devoted nearly \$300 million to help nonprofits with capital and

operating costs. Through the community spirit program, as one example, the government offers tax credits and matching donations to encourage private philanthropy. Since 2008 eligible nonprofits have divided \$52.9 million in donation grants. We are changing lives community by community.

3:30

One example of that is a program that started in February 2009. The Strathmore branch of the Foothills Advocacy in Motion Society opened. It has since helped Albertans with developmental disabilities find and maintain full- or part-time employment. That's nine more Albertans who have enriched our communities and their own lives and their families' through fulfilling jobs and personal independence, and that must happen across the province.

This government will continue to support and work with our nonprofit organizations to assist them in long-term budget planning by providing more stable multiyear granting opportunities and more predictable accountability requirements for the government grants that they receive. We will encourage our nonprofits to look for ways to increase salaries for their staff and make them comparable to those in the public sector. This will attract quality staff and make it easier to retain them. We will increase the employment income exemptions for assured income for the severely handicapped clients to encourage persons with disabilities to work to the extent that they are able.

Albertans told me through the recent campaign that the future of our health care system is their number one priority. As Premier and an Albertan I share this view, and we will be introducing a series of initiatives in the coming months that reflect this importance and the need to make our system among the very best in the world without commercializing it or compromising our values.

Innovation is already under way. Since last year the government has been funding a new procedure called the transcatheter aortic valve implantation, the TAVI, at Foothills hospital, which sees critically ill Albertans suffering from faulty heart valves get replacements made from cow tissue. Recuperation time is half that of conventional open-heart surgery. Patients too sick for open-heart surgery have received a new lease on life. To help northern Albertans and rural communities get cutting-edge cardiac care, this government is funding digital stethoscopes. Albertans can now consult with a specialist at the Mazankowski Heart Institute through secure video links even as the digital stethoscope streams their vitals in real time.

Our province has the means to provide Albertans with the care that they need in an innovative way when they need it. By putting health care on a five-year budget plan, we have allowed institutions to plan for the future with confidence, making the best use of their available resources. We will get patients the treatment they need fast and efficiently, and we will prove that providing them with regular and honest updates so that they understand the developments in our health care system will allow us to work with them and to know that the system is improving. We will invest in the health infrastructure that's needed to keep all Albertans healthy, happy, and productive.

We will establish family care clinics in communities across the province. Each clinic will be staffed by multidisciplinary teams of health care professionals, who will ease doctors' workloads. No matter what your schedule is like, no matter how busy your kids are, your family will get the care that it needs.

Seniors are among those who need the government's support the most. The government will remove the cap on seniors' housing costs and work with the home-building industry to provide seniors with the spaces they need in assisted living and continuing care

facilities, ending the bed shortage. Seniors will be able to choose from a wide variety of safe, comfortable accommodations that suit their incomes, lifestyle, and family structures. Couples that have loved and depended on each other for decades will no longer be split up.

To get things started, this government will add a thousand new continuing care beds to the system through public-private partnerships. Allowing private industry to meet seniors' needs will create more jobs in many different sectors and steady growth for our economy. To help seniors who are able to live independently, we will provide increased funding for home care, saving them from stressful trips to the hospital.

Through income supplement, housing, and home care Alberta's seniors will have access to a range of affordable housing options that address their housing and health needs as they age. Quota systems for low- and middle-income seniors will guarantee them access to the continuing care system, ensuring they have the comfortable and dignified accommodations that they deserve. Our government will do its best to ensure that all seniors stay happier and healthier for longer in their final years.

Keeping Alberta strong involves investing in our engine of innovation, people. World-class output requires world-class input. Our economy depends on intelligent, capable, and productive people, and Albertans are gifted in these areas. We have a labour pool over 2 million strong, with 64 per cent of all workers 25 and up reporting postsecondary credentials. Despite having only 11 per cent of Canada's labour force, we train 20 per cent of its apprentices. Alberta's workers are young, well educated, and highly motivated, and we're lucky to have them.

We have great foundations that our government will build on. There is no better investment of public funds than in learning and training. Without a skilled and highly educated workforce we will not attract the cutting-edge companies to carry out research and development, much less the finest minds to lead it.

We need outstanding schools and postsecondary institutions, and that means we need the most committed teachers and flexible curriculum suited to every one of our most diverse students' needs. We need an inclusive system, one that lets students from Alberta's rainbow of ethnic communities get the attention and resources that they need to excel in their adopted home.

By restoring \$107 million in funding, we have taken a first step toward reducing class sizes and restoring quality education. Now it's time to start sprinting. We will provide students with increased opportunities for apprenticeships to alleviate shortages in the trades and get teens started on the path to success and stability early. We'll put the entire education system on a three-year funding plan, ending uncertainty over budgets and providing schools with the resources that they need to meet demand from a growing population.

Our government is committed to strengthening our universities and postsecondary institutions through the creation of new initiatives that will attract the world's best scholars, researchers, teachers, and innovators to this province. We want them to stay in Alberta and train and educate future generations, who in turn will build and grow our knowledge-based industries and professions and lead new discoveries.

To enhance our leadership role further, because we've had tremendous success in that area, this government will also negotiate what we're calling externships, which are competitive placements for talented young Albertans with energy-focused organizations around the world. This will help recent graduates jump-start their careers and put Albertans at the forefront of innovation in every aspect of energy, from compliance and monitoring to research and development, and then we want them

to come back to Alberta. There will be more announced about these initiatives in the coming months.

We will ensure that all Albertans have the skills and experience to take part in the economy. We must expand the recruitment of students in rural areas and among Métis and First Nations communities. It's not enough for us to simply have statistics that say that people who come from those communities have enrolled in postsecondary institutions. We will make sure that they can access the mentorship and support programs that they need to excel.

The most enduring prosperity is spread as widely as possible. This government will make sure that every Albertan in every corner of our province has the chance to contribute. We will invest in Albertans, in their sense of discovery, in their entrepreneurial spirit, and in their hopes and dreams for them and their family. We will pass these qualities on to our children so that they also can make their futures brighter.

Much of the revenue that we use to keep our public services running comes from the energy sector. Alberta plays host to one of the most innovative and responsible energy sectors on Earth. It remains a critical part of our economy, one that can make life better for all Albertans. It supports countless additional industries and maintains hundreds of thousands of jobs, with the potential to add even more. Future projects announced for the oil sands at the moment amount to \$112 billion, and production is slated to increase 3.5 million barrels per day by 2020, and we should be excited about that.

But with our great blessings comes the responsibility to properly manage them. Our environment must be protected. Albertans have a deep respect for nature, and they have the right to be able to enjoy the natural beauties of their home, pristine and unspoiled. We as Albertans want to be proud of what's going on in our province. When we talk about what's happening around the world, we want people to know that we're good stewards of the environment. We expect to live and raise our families in healthy conditions.

3:40

Future Albertans are counting on us to keep the province's incredible biodiversity intact, and this government will. Together with our industry partners we are moving beyond monitoring to cumulative effects management, a holistic approach that considers the combined impacts of existing and proposed developments on all aspects of the environment.

When it comes to our most precious resource of all, we are going still further. The addition of "water" into the official title of the ministry of environment is more than cosmetic. Through groundwater mapping this government is developing a better understanding of water resources across the province so that we can make better water management decisions for every region. We are using the water for life strategy in working with land-use planners, watershed councils, and environmental groups across the province to develop best practices, to increase conservation, to educate Albertans, and to manage our most precious resource today, tomorrow, and for future generations.

We will accomplish this while keeping the energy sector in full bloom, partnering with the sector to find solutions to reduce its footprint. Alberta's success also requires the industry to sustainably expand. Market diversification is critical to our long-term prosperity. Global demand for energy is growing. Our production is rising. New customers are within our reach, and we have to connect with them.

Over 99 per cent of our crude exports go to the United States, but we can find more outlets. This government will support the

proposed Northern Gateway pipeline to Canada's west coast, opening up Asia to our oil. China is already our second-largest export market, and they along with many neighbours are rapidly modernizing. This government will reach out to potential Asian partners and guarantee Alberta's prosperity for decades to come.

The supereconomies of the 21st century will be those that can strategically align themselves with Asia. Alberta has a great interest in forging stronger economic links to countries like China, India, and Japan. Asia is a lucrative market of 4 billion people, and we're one of the many jurisdictions competing for market share in the Far East. How important is the Asian market? When taken together, China, Japan, Korea, and India are Alberta's second-largest export market, accounting for about \$8 billion in 2010. Alberta's trade with China alone has tripled since 2003, and that's a success.

Infrastructure improvements to ports and rails, new pipelines for bitumen and natural gas: these will help us to export more agrifood and forest products and open new markets for energy products.

Another key is Alberta's relationship with Saskatchewan and British Columbia. The New West Partnership between the three provinces allows us to market our part of Canada as one large economic trading block. Last fall the three westernmost provinces signed a memorandum of understanding to work together on issues such as seeking new market investments and new markets, especially in Asia.

The world's population is growing, and demand for our agricultural commodities is only going to grow with it. This government will work to make Alberta a dominant global supplier in an increasingly hungry world. We must raise our yield sustainably, be leaders in research, turn provincial producers into preferred global suppliers, and strengthen Alberta's ability to compete with the best in the world. Our government will provide Alberta-based producers with the financing guidance and diplomatic support to make all of this happen.

Markets are already opening up to us. In June 2010 the federal government signed off on a co-operative agreement with China that allows expanded access to Chinese markets for Canadian beef and beef products, and we can take advantage of that. Other high-priority markets include the United States, Japan, Mexico, India, and the Middle East. Our government will do everything possible to open doors further, maximizing the market access for Alberta-based producers. Agriculture and Rural Development is co-operating with the federal government, and Alberta's Ministry of Intergovernmental, International, and Aboriginal Relations will nurture relationships with foreign customers through both executive and political missions.

This government will provide incentives to help producers excel, and we've made an excellent start. Since 2009 the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, ALMA, has provided almost \$80 million to support industry projects, projects with a projected value of over \$249 million. We will continue to support the Growing Forward initiative, a partnership with Ottawa that aims to address provincial agriculture and agribusiness by investing \$273 million in the industry. This initiative has allowed Alberta to become the only province in Canada offering programs for livestock welfare, automation, lean manufacturing, and market development.

We will not overlook the market here at home. Growing local demand for Alberta-based agricultural products is the key to building new businesses, to building stronger communities and businesses that will result in increased investment, employment, and manufacturing capacity in the province. Our government will continue to back the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, a

reliable source of capital for agribusiness ventures considered too risky by private-sector lenders. Through the Agrivalue Processing Business Incubator in Leduc we will continue to provide agrifood entrepreneurs with the business guidance and assistance that they need to grow their enterprises and to stay viable. This government will go to the wall for Alberta's agricultural sector and ensure our farmers are the best in the world.

This past June 22,000 new jobs were created in Alberta, more than in the entire United States. The reason Alberta has been so successful is because it has maintained a business-friendly environment thanks to public investment and firm support for entrepreneurs. Over the past two decades Alberta has topped the country in average economic growth and is poised to regain that spot again in 2012. At the same time we continue to lead Canada in per capita investment at almost twice the national average. Government is investing in this province using savings from the good times and taking advantage of a competitive market in bad times to deliver the infrastructure that's critical to Alberta growth and to sustain Alberta communities.

We are investing \$17.6 billion to 2014, keeping over 70,000 Albertans employed during the downturn and retaining skilled workers who will be needed in the years ahead. Quality infrastructure in every community is helping local businesses grow and create jobs, and private-sector job creation is the major contributor to Albertans' quality of life.

Alberta has the largest number of small businesses per capita in Canada. They have an impact on our province completely out of proportion to their size. They contribute almost a third of our GDP, provide 37 per cent of private-sector jobs, and make up 96 per cent of all businesses in the province. Small businesses build and maintain our communities, produce our basic commodities, and pour their passion into making our lives easier every day. More than any other sector small businesses are the glue that hold Alberta together, and this government will never hesitate to defend their interests.

About 700 full-time jobs are supported by organizations that are funded through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, for example, and support through the AFA helps ensure that our artists and cultural industries continue to have access to quality content as the sector grows. In fact, more than \$246 million was spent in Alberta over the last three years as a result of film and TV productions supported by the Alberta multimedia development fund. Alberta's film industry employs roughly 3,000 Albertans in supporting industries. It has amassed 56 Oscar and 92 Emmy nominations since 1948, and we have to keep it going, Mr. Speaker.

Small businesses do more than add to our net worth; they nurture our cultural and artistic diversity, they boost tourism, and they promote our values. This should come as no surprise because small-business owners reflect Albertans' deepest values. They are independent-minded, courageous individuals, each with a unique vision of their respective enterprises, which, taken together, make up a major part of our economy.

3:50

Entrepreneurship is one of our core values, and this government will promote it. We will establish a task force that is charged with finding ways to slash red tape and to reduce the regulatory burden that constrains small-business owners. This group will have a firm deadline, and when this government has received its final report, it will put the task force's recommendations into action.

Antibusiness protests are attracting a lot of attention in the media right now, Mr. Speaker, and very close to home, but they hide a basic fact: our wealth and freedom depend on the individual right to free enterprise. From Jade Homes in Bow Island, which

builds custom homes for shipment across the province and supports a local network of contractors, to the award-winning Birds & Bees organic winery in Two Hills small businesses are an integral part of Alberta's economic landscape. They make a difference every day, growing our economy in new and exciting ways. It is time the government gets out of their way and gives them the room they need to spread their wings.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, all of our plans for a stronger Alberta must come back to finance. A healthy treasury is at the heart of any strong economy, and that's where we started today. Albertans must have a say in these plans. They must understand the government's spending priorities and have a voice in shaping them. Our government will consult with Albertans in November through public round-tables with ministers, followed by a public survey and requests for submissions. We will use the resulting feedback as we prepare our budget for 2012, so it reflects Albertans' priorities.

Let us be clear. We have some tough decisions ahead, Mr. Speaker, but Albertans have the intellect, the fortitude, the intelligence, and the entrepreneurial spirit to make the decisions that are right for the times and right for them. We must make better use of the funds we have, and we must grow our economy and our revenue base without job-killing taxes or legislation.

Albertans themselves are best equipped to guarantee the province's prosperity. The government's job is to create the conditions to let them do so and then get out of the way. Albertans expect no less from us. This means no provincial sales tax and as little public interference as possible in Albertans' rights to earn a living, start a business, and make a profit.

Sound financial habits also involve sensible budgeting. We must spend smarter and avoid the path of least resistance. Simplistic solutions and wide-eyed spending promises are not the answer, but neither are purely ideological positions, Mr. Speaker. Our plans for stable, multiyear budgets for essential public services will bring unprecedented discipline and accountability to public spending. Other governments have talked about doing it; we will make it happen.

Department budgets will only grow when there is a clear need, and we will conduct regulatory budgetary reviews to find savings and approve budgets wherever possible within the year. Albertans want government to be more responsible about spending, and we will be. We will treat taxpayers' money with the same respect that they do. The effort to keep spending in check will not stop there. Albertans expect their government to plan for the future, and we will not let them down. We will balance the budget by 2013-14, and we will plan ahead, Mr. Speaker.

To further protect Alberta's finances, we will keep the sustainability and heritage funds topped up. Parents do not leave their children with debt. They invest in their children's future, passing on a responsible legacy that allows their children to live their own lives and to realize their own dreams. We will keep the province's coffers full and its outlooks bright no matter what the world economy throws our way, and we will understand where we are going as well as Albertans because they share these same values.

Alberta equals opportunity, and this government must do everything it can to promote this simple fact. We have the means and the resources to make it truer than ever. We have the skills and the abilities. We have what we need. We have the will, and we will act.

Alberta has a vibrant economy built on dedicated small businesses and thriving industries. Our government will work with them to grow our prosperity even more. Alberta has no shortage of incredible people dedicated to doing everything they can to make

Alberta caring, compassionate, and fair. Our government will help them realize that goal. Our goal is to ensure economic success and a great quality of life for everyone in a province where hard work is rewarded and no one turns a blind eye to want or hardship. Together we will build a province where world-class, fully funded public services are there when you need them. We will insulate this province from the shocks of the global economy and build the best Alberta possible. We are already headed in this direction, Mr. Speaker. This government working together with Albertans will get us there.

This is not a partisan project. Fellow Members of the Legislative Assembly, you sit in this Assembly for one reason and one reason only as we all do: because we believe in Alberta. You want what's best for this province and its people. Every single one of us ran for office on this platform, and every single one of us comes to work each and every day knowing that we have another chance to make things better for Alberta. We will always be divided to some extent by our different visions, but in our hearts we want the same thing. I know that with a little goodwill, we can see past some of our differences. With a little effort we can come together for Alberta. We are incomparably stronger together than apart. We can give Albertans the exceptional government and outstanding public services that they expect. We can make Alberta the best place in the world to live, to start a business, to raise a family, and to retire. We can ensure that Alberta continues to be the best place in the world to live. Period. Together we can achieve amazing things.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I'll now recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. My understanding is that there remain about 24 minutes available for additional speakers from the government side on a rotation basis.

The hon. leader of the official and loyal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, thank you and thank you to all Albertans. On behalf of the great province of Alberta I'd like to first congratulate our new Premier for making history as the first woman Premier of this wonderful province.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Albertans for the privilege of addressing the Assembly as Leader of the Official Opposition, as leader of the party upon which this great province was founded, the party of Premier Rutherford, which sat on March 15, 1906 – the same birth date as my daughter, the same date upon which I joined this party, the same party that allowed women the right to vote – the Alberta Liberal Party.

Mr. Speaker, we didn't all get here by ourselves. Please allow me to share with you an unlikely story of hope, a Canadian story and an Albertan story. My grandfather came here at the age of 17 in 1906. He came here for adventure and in search of a better opportunity for his family. He showed up on a ship in Vancouver. He worked on the railway. He went to school, became a sawmill engineer, and was an integral part of building the logging industry in British Columbia. One thing he didn't have: freedom in his home nation of India. He was an integral part of freedom of the biggest functioning, youngest democracy on the planet today.

4:00

When India gained democracy, unfortunately it was good for some, not good for others as millions were displaced along the northern frontier. My mother's grandfather: his family became refugees. My mother as an eight-year-old child was raised in a refugee village. I was born in that little town in the middle of nowhere in the Thar Desert.

In 1965 on September 1 – on the same day, September 1, Alberta was founded – my father left India for Canada, when I was two months old, to make a better life for his young wife and three young boys. Times were tough, Mr. Speaker. Wages were low. He was a teacher by trade, but he had to work as a labourer in the lumber industry.

He first worked as a mailman, and then he worked as a prison guard in Oakalla penitentiary, and then he worked in the mills that his father had built. He couldn't afford to visit his family because flights were expensive, so instead he sent enough money for food at home, and finally seven years later he was reunited with his family.

Dad brought us to this country, and it was different. We didn't have our social network, and times were tough. I remember my mother taking us three boys and a new baby to the farms in the Fraser Valley and picking strawberries 14 hours a day every summer as our summer holiday. She grew up on a farm, and she knew the value of hard work and the importance of teaching her children how to work honestly and how to work hard.

My father worked in the mill. My mother got a job sewing clothes. Interestingly enough, she was a seamstress for the Oilers' uniforms in the early '80s, when they won all those Stanley Cups. We had Wayne Gretzky's uniforms in my house, and she couldn't pronounce his name, but she marvelled about why this one player had so many uniforms. Then our mother cleaned toilets and hotel rooms to make a better life for us.

Mr. Speaker, this is a story unlike most Albertans' and most Canadians'. Our parents came from lands far and away, from every different country in search of opportunity, and they worked hard. They worked beneath their education and skill level so their children would have a better chance, and their dreams are reflected in their children and their grandchildren. What they taught us was the value of hard work, honesty, and an education, a good public education. It was a way out of poverty.

Mr. Speaker, today we are talking about an urgent matter of public importance. The government has decided that there's an emergency in the global economy and that we should talk about it. As an emergency physician I would say that this emergency has been going on for a long time in the global economy, and it causes me due concern that we're discussing such emergent issues and going on vacation in 24 hours.

"The future direction, place, and opportunity of Alberta in Canada and the world given the current economic uncertainty in Europe, the state of the U.S. economy, the importance of Asian growth and markets, and the impact of the same on Alberta and Albertans": that's the question posed before us today.

Mr. Speaker, there is much uncertainty across the world. Why? Because it's caused by governments who place their needs and the needs of their friends above those of the people they are supposed to represent. The truth is that more than a billion people in the world today live on less than \$1 a day. I know that because I used to live that life as a child. Infant mortality rates are high, life expectancy and quality of life are low, and diseases run rampant because drugs are too expensive and poorly distributed.

But we here in the modern westernized world don't care enough to do anything about those emergencies unless our own economic stability is threatened. We are quick to act to shore up potential problems in our own interests, but we hesitate to prevent human suffering in lands abroad.

It's the same reason we don't have adequate investment into prevention and wellness in Alberta. We refuse to see the bigger picture, and we forget that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure or a few billion dollars' worth of cure. Those of us who have worked or lived through these conditions understand

true poverty and true struggle and the real value of life because we've lived it and we've experienced it.

In the humanitarian missions abroad the Premier and my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View and many of you have seen first-hand the devastating effects of abject poverty and social injustice, so I would ask all of us here to maintain some perspective. Alberta is still the best province in the best country in the world despite what others may say. A bad day in Alberta is still better than the best day in the majority of places on the planet. We are truly blessed to be living in the best province in the best country in the world.

It's ironic that Albertans, living in one of the most wealthy, stable jurisdictions, are being told that economic problems outside take precedence over so many more important opportunities right here at home within our own borders, opportunities such as good public health care; a quality education system for all regardless of ability to pay; restoring dignity to our seniors, who built this province with the sweat of their brow and the toil of their hands; opportunities to support our aboriginal communities, so long neglected by government; and to protect our water and environment for the future.

When I look at the protests in the streets of other countries, it seems to me that many problems of the global economy are caused when governments lose their perspective, when they forget their purpose, when they ignore the people that they are supposed to serve and, instead, begin to serve a rich, powerful few, the influential and the connected. This is the real crisis, Mr. Speaker. This is the real emergency that this planet and at times this province face.

When connected individuals circumnavigate the rules with inside help from government ministries, the people are the ones who pay the price, the hard-working people who built this province. Thomas Jefferson once said: "When governments fear the people, there is liberty. When the people fear the government, there is tyranny." That's what's happening across the world. Tyrants are being removed by the people because they have failed the people.

I want every company, every municipality, and every Albertan to remember that next election. They should remember that. Ask yourself what kind of society you want to live in, in the same old company town or in a truly free and democratic society with justice and opportunity for all, where freedom of speech is truly respected as freedom of speech, a society where you're judged by the content of your character and the merit of your actions, not by the size of your political donation to the governing party.

Do you want responsible and effective use of your money, or do you want to keep throwing it into a bottomless pit? That's a question we need to ask. These are the kinds of misaligned priorities, Mr. Speaker, that are so dangerous to competitive economies and the citizens who work and live within them. These are the reasons why I am on this side along with my new colleagues and friends here instead of on that side. My old friends there believe that the people of this province exist to give the government and those connected to it wealth and power. We believe that the government's wealth and power exist to serve the people.

Let's talk about Canada, Mr. Speaker. This is the best country in the world. Why? Good government. We had a really good government that paid down the deficits, paid down the debt. We had a really good government that represented all Canadians, a really good government that worked in partnership with Albertans to develop the oil sands.

I recently went to the Syncrude pit. There is something called Chrétien Point. A Liberal government helped develop it in

partnership with Albertans and signed the declaration of opportunity to develop the goose that lays the golden egg not only for Alberta but the nation, a nation that today in the face of an international crisis is actually a safe haven. I will say that everyone in the world would love to come to Canada if they had the chance.

Since we're talking about the global economy, it was actually the global economy that brought all of our parents and grandparents here from across the world in search of a better life.

4:10

Let's talk about Alberta. There are many unparalleled advantages in this great province, many advantages that we actually used to have and still could possibly have, advantages that led me and my family to move here so many years ago. But it's the caring, determined, and principled people who live in Alberta – not the government; it's the people – who make it easy to call this place home.

You see, Albertans' values are the same values of all of our families: the importance of a good education, hard work, and belief in oneself, that you play by the rules and always tell the truth, that you always aim to reach the stars. Actually, you don't talk about it. You just get out and do it. That's what Albertans do. We're doers.

My early years weren't easy, and neither were the early years of many in this House: poverty, hunger, for me personally intolerance, discrimination. Many in this House took any jobs that they could, whether it was paper routes, picking berries, cleaning hotel rooms, working in the mill, driving taxi, working construction, or working in professions: you name it. Our story is not unique. It's shared by many millions of Albertans and Canadians right across this great nation. It is a part of our identity. It's who we are. Albertans work hard. We play by the rules, and we know the value of a dollar. We believe that all things are possible.

Albertans just want a simple life. We want good jobs for our families, whether it's in farming, the oil and gas industry, forestry, or the knowledge-based economy. We want to maintain those same values and the sense of community, that we care for one another when we can't care for ourselves. We want to make sure that all our children have a chance to get an education, that the size of your wallet does not determine access to good public education or postsecondary education, that if you're sick and you're vulnerable, you will be looked after without reaching inside your savings account or your wallet, and that once you've built this great province, we will treat you with dignity and respect.

Government's role in our lives. The government's job is to pass rules and laws, fewer rules and laws but good rules and laws, that encourage amazing, beautiful things to happen when an Albertan has an idea and they want to take a risk and want to start a business, but those same rules and laws must also protect the people and the environment as well as industry.

Governments don't have all the solutions and all the answers. Albertans have the solutions. They have the answers to all their problems. They don't expect governments to solve all their problems. They know that they have to work hard, but they want government to create that great atmosphere I talked about for great things to happen. They want government to get out of the way, and they want government to stop taking credit for what they've actually done. We are living here in this place and time, and it's our turn now. We're doers. We see problems, we analyze them, and we find the best possible solutions. We crank up a full head of steam and face the challenges head-on.

Mr. Speaker, Premier Peter Lougheed was a doer. He was a Premier who truly understood the global economy and his people. He was bold and creative. He started the heritage savings trust fund. He made sure that we had community-based hospital boards and school boards. He made sure that there were local solutions to local problems. He made sure that every child had an opportunity to get an education; it didn't matter where they were from or how much their parents had. He made sure that every senior was looked after, that everyone had good health care. He made sure that every Albertan had a family doctor.

Not only did he balance the books after looking after the people; he put billions upon billions upon billions in the bank. He created great infrastructure. He invested in arts and culture, a story that is still told today that Albertans can be proud of. Under him people who needed help got it. Civil servants had the freedom to do their jobs and to do them well without political interference. People who experienced Premier Lougheed as their Premier say that he made them proud to be an Albertan. I am still proud to be an Albertan because of Premier Lougheed.

Mr. Speaker, what's happened to our province since he departed public service? We've been given three big booms, three of the biggest lottery tickets on the planet, yet we have a deficit. Where did our money go? Where did it go? Another country has put hundreds of billions in the bank, and they're living off the interest. We have the lowest high school completion rate in the nation. We have the highest university tuition fees in the nation and the lowest university participation rate in the nation. We're nickel and diming our seniors. Hard-working, middle-class Alberta families are being nickelled and dimed to death for school fees. Jobs: we're still dependent on the boom-bust cycle. When the economy is good, you've got to work too much. When it's bad, you're not working at all.

It's the centralization of power in the hands of a powerful few that Premier Lougheed fought. He returned power to the people, and that's the power that's been taken away from the people by the people who pretend to live by the vision of Premier Lougheed. That's what we must return to.

Management. Mr. Speaker, did you know that total personal and corporate income tax account for \$12 billion of income, yet health care alone costs \$15 billion? Why do we have the highest funded, second-worst performing health care system in the nation when under Premier Lougheed it was one of the best performing systems in the nation?

How long has it been since we've heard people say: "Wow. What a great idea from the government. What a great government program?" How long since we have heard good news, good, brand new, fresh ideas from the government? It's no wonder that people don't take part in the democratic system. Sixty per cent of Albertans did not vote, and that's a shame in a democratic country after our young men and women years ago, in fact many of our seniors, fought for the right to have the vote. There's a whole generation that has never seen a different kind of government or heard a single new creative idea.

Generally, it seems that when I was in government they weren't doers; they were don't-ers. More often than not the current government are the ideologically driven slashers, cutters, downsizers, centralizers, privatizers after the election, but the funny thing is that before the election the government has been whatever you want them to be to get your vote. After the election it's the opposite. The same thing is being said again. We need a government that does what it says and says what it does.

These are the people who actually believe that if you cut environmental enforcement officers, polluters will actually naturally take a step. They'll step up to the plate, and they will

report their transgressions and fix things on their own. They think it's okay to bully municipalities to support a political party or they'll get their funding cut off or that a good business practice is to alter government programs so that your buddies get exclusive access to hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars and our resource dollars.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there is a view of government that is of cold administrative cost efficiency, yet I would say that it's cost inefficiency rather than proper delivery of services, which makes people's lives richer, fuller, and more hopeful.

The real emergency is that we've got bad government. That's the real emergency. We affect the lives of many not only here but in the nation and abroad. Imagine the tremendous amount of good we could do on this planet if we could get our house in order. We need good government decisions. We've been changing leaders when they're about to lose an election by saying that this is change when it's the same backroom boys making the same bad, old decisions.

We have deficit after deficit. What we really have is a deficit in democracy. More and more citizens are viewed as a set of costs rather than human beings with infinite and amazing potential. They have become experts in saying no. No to public home care; no to public lodges; no to public long-term care, community based; no to predictable and sustainable funding for municipalities or important social programs; no to our teachers; no to our nurses and no to our doctors and no to our patients; no to Albertans; no to respecting human rights and the rights of the landowners: no to this and no to that and less of more and more.

4:20

They forgot what an enlightened government is about. An enlightened government is about investment in a better society. It's a way of improving the experience of the people, a way that people just like you and me can live normal and good lives and achieve our potential.

Instead of talking about wasted potential, I'd like to talk about unrealized potential. This government has politicized far too much a civil service and demoralized some of the best and most brilliant civil servants on the planet. They've either silenced them or driven them out of their jobs. In the middle and lower ranks of the provincial civil service talented, highly skilled individuals, people educated here who really know what to do and how to do it, are muzzled or silenced and intimidated into humiliating silence. It's bullying, and it's wrong, Mr. Speaker. It's undemocratic, and it's un-Albertan.

Nobody truly respects or likes a bully. As we've seen recently, the brand of political bullying has gone much further. Threats are made or implied through spending of public money, and presto, volunteers and healthy political donations magically appear. This is wrong, and it must stop. Even private-sector companies and consultants in a province of a country that respects competition and free markets know that their chances of landing a provincial contract increase if they go to a golf tournament of the governing party. People's livelihoods are being affected by what political party they belong to and what signs they have on their lawns. This must stop. It's twisted, and it's wrong. It's the very opposite of what Albertans value, of what Premier Peter Lougheed valued.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about solutions, solutions and what Albertans value, about individualism and community. We believe in the rights of the individual in this province, but we also share their common sense of purpose of a community. If we want to fix our province, we need true open, honest, accountable government. We need government that will do what it says and say what it does. We need government ministries that will effectively and

efficiently use your tax dollars and get you the best value for your service. We need ministries that naturally work together, fewer ministries, not make-work projects for too many elected officials on one side of the aisle here. If you want health care to function, you actually need to deal with seniors' housing. Infrastructure and transportation should be together. Finance and Treasury Board should be together. Let's get down to 16 ministries.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

We need better management, better fiscal management. It's about value. What are we getting for our tax dollar? I would argue that we can do much better than we're currently doing. We need to do it, and we should. Albertans expect much more of us.

Let's talk about the economy. We've gone through these boom-bust cycles. Let's talk about the energy economy. It is the goose that lays the golden egg, and we must protect it. Natural gas was in the boots for a while, but my understanding is that liquefied natural gas, if we export it to the west coast to other markets, fetches us triple the price. Let's get it out there to the west coast. Our best friend and neighbour, the greatest risk, the U.S., is on the verge of bankruptcy. They can't afford our product. We sell 80 per cent of our product there.

Our oil industry. Let's export our oil to the west coast, and let's make sure that we protect the pristine coast of British Columbia, ensuring that the environmental regulations are enforced, making sure that the tankers are safe, that we have double-hull tankers taking our product. But before we export our product out of our province, let's make sure we upgrade more of it at home. It's not going to be easy to do because of the cost of upgrading, but let's work with industry to build value, better jobs. What's the rush? We're already so short of labour.

Also, we must deal with the very real environmental issues. The greatest threat to our economy not only is our best friend and neighbour not having enough money; it's international policies on carbon. Our economy is overly intensive on carbon. We must decrease our carbon footprint. We must deal with the water issues. We must have good monitoring and not self-monitoring.

Beyond energy, let's work with agriculture and the forestry sector. Like my grandfather did, let's go sell our food abroad. We've got the best and safest soil on the planet.

Health care. Health care can be part of the economy of the future, the knowledge-based economy. Let's invest in good public education. In order to fix health care, you actually have to fix education and have good jobs. On a microscopic level to fix the ER wait time, the reason we still have problems year after year is because we haven't dealt with public home care and nonprofit public long-term care and subacute care and rehab care and palliative care for our seniors and those dying at home or dying in the hallways of the hospitals. Well, that can be fixed. That has to be fixed by getting rid of the faulty for-profit seniors' policy. We need to go back to the community.

We need to get every Albertan a family doctor that works with a team of professionals. When 70 per cent of our students want to become specialists because of the money made by the overprivatization of health care, that's the problem. Let's build our system and be a world-wide centre on primary care and prevention. Let's bring in the medical home model. Let's bring the care to you in your home. That's what the Europeans do, and that's why their system works well.

Let's use our community schools as community hubs. Let's stop using our schools as rental properties for our private buddies. Schools should belong to the community 24 hours a day. Let's connect our seniors and junior daycares to the schools, put a

public health clinic in there. Not only do we need more teachers; the \$170 million funding didn't fix the school system. That just restored it back to where it was, when 30 per cent of our kids are dropping out. We've got to do much more. Put in the supports that the teachers need to educate our children. Let's look after our seniors. We must treat them with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

I'd like to talk about the politics of hope, not the politics of cynicism. Mr. Speaker, I'm the new guy on this side of the House. All we did over there last year was have a cabinet shuffle. That didn't change. Don't be fooled. Nothing has fundamentally changed in the economy or the way the government does business. Everyone over there on that side of the House knows it, and they believe passionately in what they're doing.

I believe passionately that this province needs to change our government, so today I'm going to ask Albertans to watch us, watch us and participate in the politics of yes. On this side it's about: yes, we will support an open, honest, and accountable government; yes for respect for your hard-earned tax dollars; yes to better jobs for all Albertans; yes to true market competition, where contracts are based on merit and negotiated in public; yes to view municipalities as full and equal partners, not just wards of the state; yes to government that respects its professionals and civil service; yes to a supportive new approach to performing and visual arts funding so that after a hard day at work Albertans can relax and enjoy themselves; yes to a government that wants to restore a good Samaritan and neighbour as a core value to being Albertans; yes to fixing public health care and public education, not selling it off to the private buddies like it was done before. You won't have to take your credit card out or be nickelled and dimed for fees while you get less.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, that we need to be doers and not don't-ers. So please watch our party and watch our friends. Watch this province as it changes.

Mr. MacDonald: And watch your wallet.

Dr. Sherman: Watch your wallet with these guys in power, and watch your back. We're going to watch your back. We're going to stand up for you. We're going to fight for you. We're going to fight for what's right when you're being wronged. We're going to make a commitment to educate all of our children, leave no child behind. Every Alberta child should expect to graduate from high school. Every Alberta child who wants to go to a postsecondary or get a trade or get a skill should have that opportunity.

We say yes to our seniors. We say yes to every Albertan who wants a family doctor. We say yes to dignity. And you know what else, Mr. Speaker? Above all we say yes to telling the truth, to always being honest. If there are mistakes to be made, they will be honest mistakes, not dishonest mistakes.

In summary, I'd like to say that the most precious resource in Alberta isn't what's in the ground, what's on the ground. It's the people, the hardworking, industrious people and their children and grandchildren, people who have come from afar in search of a better life and hope and dream to be the best that they can be. That hope is embodied in our children, and that's what we propose to do. We propose that we put power back in the hands of the people. That's what needs to be done, the same thing Peter Lougheed did 40 years ago.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, change is in the air, and it's time – it's time – that there's a real choice for a real chance for real change. It's time for Albertans to change their government. Alberta, all you have to do

is get out and vote. If 80 per cent of Albertans vote, they will change their government. In the words of Gandhi: Alberta, you must be the change that you want to see in the world.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for this opportunity. It's truly an honour to be here as a public servant of Her Majesty's opposition fighting for Albertans alongside my colleagues. May God bless Alberta. God bless Canada.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, that was 32 minutes. There will be 28 minutes left to carry on.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations to the Premier on her leadership victory. Although it was not a mandate from all Albertans, her actions will now affect Albertans greatly, and because of that I wish her the very best in good judgment.

Today I have a few tough words – I know that's a surprise – but these are words that need to be spoken. They're from the heart because like everyone in this House I love this province, and I'm worried about the direction she's heading right now. Mr. Speaker, the world is indeed experiencing troubled times, and although the blessing of abundant resources and still-record-high oil prices has insulated us more than almost any place on earth, we are certainly not immune to the turmoil outside our borders.

There are several causes of this turmoil, but the main ones are these: corruption and a lack of ethics in government and around corporate boardroom tables, fiscal irresponsibility by governments and individuals, and a culture of "What's in it for me?" that is becoming far too common among far too many in society. In one word our problem is selfishness and its siblings greed and corruption.

What the world so desperately needs and what this province needs to avoid disaster is leaders and role models and parents with the integrity, courage, and wisdom to stand up and do and say what is right when it's hard, not just when it's easy and convenient. Unfortunately, I fear our new Premier does not understand the need for such leadership. I fear that because her actions over the last three weeks have shouted down her increasingly hollow words and promises of change.

Alberta needs a leader to end the era of fear and intimidation that has become so prevalent in this province. We need a leader who shows by her actions that government funding for community services and infrastructure isn't dependent on a town council's or an individual's support for the PC Party. We need a leader who will tell her cabinet and caucus that if it is confirmed that any of them have been undertaking actions to intimidate or remove from their jobs potential candidates of other parties or health workers or others, those intimidators and bullies will be kicked out of her party without any hesitation. We need a leader who sees the outright corruption that is the Bill 50 transmission lines project, repeals the bill fully, and starts over with an independent needs assessment so that ratepayers are protected from billions in unnecessary costs.

We need a leader who shows by her actions, not just her words, that she is committed to democracy and to following through with commitments made by keeping and not flip-flopping on her promise of fixed election dates, one that doesn't cancel the fall sitting of the Legislature, then restart it for two days, take a month off, then come back for a week, and in justifying it says, "It's not necessary for us to be in the house to make government decision – that is the job of the cabinet of the premier." Sorry, Premier. You're wrong. Legislation and policy decisions proposed by government are to be debated and passed by the peoples'

representatives, not by cabinet fiat, and this Premier should be ashamed of suggesting otherwise, particularly with her background and good work in advocating for democracy in other countries.

We need a leader who demands integrity and competence from those that surround her rather than appointing as the most powerful civil servant in a \$40 billion government an individual whose company won't pay its creditors despite repeated court judgments to do so. How can one promise to govern with fiscal competence when her first move is to appoint someone who represents the very opposite of that? We need a leader who selects government appointments based on merit, after a full and open competition of the best and brightest of Alberta, not one who appoints her biggest leadership rival because it's a politically convenient way to get him out of sight and out of mind.

We need a leader who understands that Alberta has a spending problem and doesn't promise billions of taxpayer dollars for the purposes of blatantly buying votes, a leader who is committed to balancing the budget now, that won't mortgage the future of our kids to try and save her party's political hide. In short, we need a leader with the ethics and thoughtfulness of Preston Manning, not a reincarnation of Joe Clark.

Mr. Speaker, I love this province like everyone here. We have such amazing people and potential. I sometimes sit in wonderment as I think about the opportunities that we have at our fingertips right now. But we are selling ourselves short. Our new Premier has not been up to the challenge during her first three weeks. I hope that changes. Albertans expect better, Madam Premier. My four sons and every child in Alberta deserve better. What is happening in this province right now is unacceptable. I hope you realize that it isn't just about winning; it's about doing the right thing for the right reasons. There's a lot of time to still change and to get back on the right track, away from what's happened over this first three weeks of your administration. Let's see you do what you said you would do and advocate for true change.

On behalf of the Wildrose caucus and our leader, Danielle Smith, let me assure all Albertans that the Wildrose stands ready to govern if called upon. We can't and won't promise the world, but in these unsettled times we do promise this: we will bring accountability to government by mandating free votes, fixed elections, and voter recall; we will end the culture of fear and intimidation that currently permeates our business, health, and political communities; we will shine a bright light of transparency in every corner and closet of government; and we will work to clean out the skeletons and the cobwebs that we find.

We will balance the budget and start saving some of our oil wealth without delay because we owe it to our children to do so. We will target Albertans' tax dollars for the things that matter most to them like health and education, teachers and doctors, and seniors. And we will cut without any reservation the PC corporate welfare handouts, the pet projects, the executive bonuses, the new MLA offices, the replacement museums, the cabinet salary increases, the golden handshakes, and all of the deals behind closed doors that cost Albertans millions.

We will defend Alberta's largest industry aggressively and competently. We are proud of producing the most ethical oil on earth and will work with our energy entrepreneurs to continually improve upon their already strong track record of environmental stewardship. There's always room to do better.

This is what the Wildrose has been and will continue to fight for. Whether Albertans give us 16 or 60 seats in the next election, our principles will remain unchanged: fiscally conservative, pro-entrepreneur, democratic and transparent, giving a hand up and not a handout, respect for local decision-making, and the

protection of the liberties of families and individuals. These principles reflect the values of Albertans. If we as a province adhere to them, we will weather the global economic storm and become a true beacon of prosperity and freedom in all the world. If we continue to abandon these principles as so many in this House and around the world have done, we will become a tragic and forgotten footnote in history. It's time for Alberta to stand back up and lead the way again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

The Acting Speaker: That was eight minutes.

Our next speaker is the hon. leader of the New Democratic Party, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by offering my congratulations to our new Premier. That was amazing. I watched the campaign quite closely, and I think it was an extremely interesting and well-executed win. Congratulations.

Mr. Speaker, usually on the first day of a new Premier and the last day I try to just say really nice things, but because we only have a two-day session, I'm very much constrained with regard to that rule. So people will have to forgive me, but I want to talk a little bit and respond to some of the things that the Premier has said. I think, first of all, that what was going to be a speech about international opportunities and the international situation actually turned into a bit of a bait and switch. We've got now a faux throne speech to respond to, so I'm going to try my very best to do that.

I know that the Premier has talked about the debt crisis internationally and its impact on the world. But I don't accept her characterization of this debt crisis as something where these countries in Europe were just spending way too much money, you know, and now they've got themselves in a real mess. That does not get down to what's really gone on and the role of the banking industry internationally in creating this situation for these countries like the banking industry did for people who had properties in the United States a couple of years ago or who invested in retirement products and so on. They've ensnared countries, and now the people who work for a living – the low-income people, the seniors, the young people – are the ones that are being forced to bear the brunt of it through cuts to the services that they depend on. They had nothing to do with the creation of this crisis, Mr. Speaker.

We've seen around the world that the Occupy Wall Street movement, for all its flaws, has really given a voice to the fact that the interests internationally of the very wealthiest people in the world are being put ahead of the vast majority of people in the world who are being asked to pay the price.

We were asking our schoolchildren to pay the price for this government's financial mismanagement. Now because of public pressure the government has reversed itself but has said that the hundred million dollars that they need in order to re-fund the education system will come from in-house or in-year savings. In other words, they are going to transfer these cuts from schoolchildren to others. We don't know who it's going to be, but it's clear that they're going to expect the people of Alberta, not their friends in the banking industry and the oil industry, to pay the price.

The Premier talked about health care when you need it. I want to talk a little bit about health care in the province, Mr. Speaker, because I haven't heard some of the things that I think we need to hear. We need to hear about a long-term care strategy that properly funds long-term care, which is part of the health system, because that is one of the key reasons why we have such a

shortage of acute-care beds. The government is going ahead to build more expensive acute-care beds instead of solving the problem by reversing its strategy of private delivery for long-term care, which will never work and which will not solve the problems of the seniors in our province.

Similarly with mental health care, Mr. Speaker. There is a severe shortage of mental health beds, and people who need mental health care are occupying much more expensive acute-care beds. Then those beds are not available to people who are discharged from emergency rooms, which backs everything up into the waiting rooms and out onto the street.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Premier wants to build trust, but she has appointed as minister of health someone who has been piloting the privatization strategy of this government for years, someone who presented this strategy to the Conservative caucus, and someone who I think is the genius, if you could call it that, behind this government's plans to delist services, introduce private insurance options for people because they'll no longer be covered by medicare, increase the role of private hospitals, allow doctors to operate both in the public and the private system; in other words, a very, very serious blow to our publicly delivered and publicly funded health care system.

Mr. Speaker, instead, I think this Legislature should be debating the NDP's Bill 208, a private member's bill. Some of that private members' time has been lost to have this debate today, so I want to mention Bill 208, which would prohibit the delivery of surgical services in private facilities, which would ensure that all services are properly funded and which would extend coverage in medicare, not remove coverage, not retreat but advance and extend our medicare system to cover things like dental care for kids. There are tens of thousands of kids who have no dental care in this province, and the government has no plan to deal with that.

Seniors' drug plan: two strikes on this government. They've completely failed to come up with an alternative, and there are many seniors that cannot afford the drugs in this province because they have so many prescriptions and it's \$25 per prescription. There are no answers in that speech for the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier talked about a smarter future. I mentioned the reversal on the education cuts, which are exactly the cuts that were made by this government, of which the Premier was a member, and nobody stood up and said: I disagree with it. I asked the Minister of Education at the time repeatedly to do something about it, and all I got were excuses and obfuscation. Those cuts are going to be reversed at the expense of some other program cuts because they're not prepared to use the sustainability fund or other options available to them.

Alberta continues to have some of the highest dropout rates in the country. We have school fees that are charged across the board to kids to go to school. Differential tuition for professional faculties are far too high, and the government continues to allow postsecondary institutions to charge noninstructional fees, really tuition fees, just a loophole that's created for those institutions because they haven't been funded adequately. They're going to get the funding that they need on the backs of their students.

All of this creates inequality in access to education, Mr. Speaker. The government likes to talk about its wonderful student aid program, but I can tell you that there are debts in excess of \$100,000. I met with some medical students not too long ago, and they talked about their debt upon graduation being somewhere in the range of \$200,000. It may be that as a doctor they'll be able to

pay that off, but that is something that is a huge barrier to kids from modest-income families, who will not even imagine being able to run up a debt like that. So we have a real problem with accessibility and equality of opportunity in our education system. An NDP government will fight for and will bring forward programs to make sure that accessibility is, in fact, a key priority of the government of Alberta.

The speech dealt with energy and the environment. Mr. Speaker, I think there are very different visions between this Progressive Conservative government and the NDP with regard to this. We continue to charge some of the lowest royalties in the world, and we are sitting on perhaps the most valuable strategic petroleum resource in the world with a ready-made market, and we are getting pennies on the dollar for what that is actually worth to the owners of that resource, which is the people of Alberta. We're continuing to ramp up the export of unprocessed bitumen and letting the jobs that go with upgrading that and refining it go down the pipeline to the United States, and the government does nothing.

They support the Keystone pipeline upgrade even though a U.S. State Department report clearly says that if that upgrade to that pipeline is not built, more investment and jobs will be created in Canada than in the United States. That's why the United States wants it, and that's why we are so, so foolish in allowing that pipeline to go ahead with our blessing.

Mr. Speaker, the government has brought no plan to clean up the settling ponds, which are an international black eye for our province, and it's high time that we did that. It's high time we made sure that there is no downstream contamination affecting the people at Fort Chip and other places where people live. The effect on cancer rates is unacceptable, and it should not be tolerated by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the water market. Although today they ruled out the export of water from the province, they are still determined to bring about a water market in this province. There has been no analysis of what that market would actually look like, who the players are and the financial resources that they have that they could bring to bear in terms of that and the distortions that would be created, for example, by large oil companies or companies like Nestlé, who wanted to buy up water resources and then sell them back to people. The effect of a water market on water prices in this province, I think, will be dramatic. It's going to go nowhere but up if the government continues with this misguided, right-wing ideological approach to our most precious resource in this province, something that is a right of everyone. I think that it's completely the wrong direction.

4:50

Nor has the government brought forward a comprehensive plan for developing green energy in our province. Renewable energy is the future. Other countries are investing billions and billions of dollars in green energy, and we are just sitting here basically twiddling our thumbs. We're happy that there's a little bit of wind power, and we think that carbon capture and storage has got something to do with green energy. Well, Mr. Speaker, it does not. We were surpassed long ago by Europe, by California, and other parts of the United States. Even in Asia, the subject of the Premier's comments about the growth of the importance of Asia, China is investing billions of dollars in renewable energy research and development, and we are going to be caught with absolutely nothing but an obsolete energy source sooner or later.

Mr. Speaker, there were some things said about agriculture, which I want to refer to. I just want to say that an NDP government is committed to the family farm and is committed to

small farms. The move of this government with its cousins in Ottawa to eliminate the single desk of the Canadian Wheat Board is a very serious blow to small farmers in this province. The farmers themselves have repeatedly voted in a referendum and previously in elections for their directors for a continuation of the single desk. This is something that a few large corporate farms that have the government's ear want to see, but it is not something that the majority of wheat farmers want to see in this province or in Canada, for that matter. Again, it's a triumph of right-wing ideology over common sense and not something that we're going to go along with.

I want to indicate that an NDP government supports balanced budgets, and we have for years. I want to also say that we support fair and competitive taxes. Right now our taxes may be competitive, but they are not fair. The burden has been placed on middle-class families and on working families at the expense of the very wealthiest in our society. I've already mentioned the flat tax as an important piece of that. This government has walked away from billions of dollars, not from taxpayers in general but only from the wealthiest taxpayers, who have been given massive tax breaks, and the result has been the budgets that we see. We've become so dependent on volatile resource revenue, now running at about 30 per cent of our program spending, that when the price of oil drops, we're laying off teachers or we're laying off nurses. We can do better. An NDP government will do far, far better than this government has ever done in making sure that we have balanced budgets, and they won't be balanced on the backs of schoolchildren, I can tell you that, Mr. Speaker.

One thing that the Premier didn't talk much about in her speech is the whole question of democracy. Now, we know that Tory governments have been promising more openness and transparency for years, and they've delivered anything but. We still have, I believe, the most secretive government in Canada. When the government has a plan for private health care, they will present it in their caucus, but none of their public reports or public statements will reveal the real plan. The former Premier promised more long-term care beds in the last provincial election. They actually reversed the policy, and we revealed that by releasing a document. That's how you find out what this government is doing; somebody gives you something, and you can read what they're actually doing because what they say and what they're doing are two different things. Their long-term care strategy is actually to reduce the number of long-term care beds. They've never acknowledged it, but it is, in fact, the policy that they are implementing.

I didn't hear anything from the Premier about election finance reform, and perhaps no wonder, because as Justice minister she's the one that conveniently shuffled off the whole question of leadership campaign donations being subject to the same public disclosure requirements as regular elections. That's still off in limbo somewhere. Very convenient because in her campaign, of course, she raised a great deal of money, and we should have had that legislation in place.

I'm disappointed, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, in some of the decisions that have been made with respect to this government's cabinet. It's one thing to run against the old boys. It's quite another to appoint them to your cabinet. I have not seen that there's been a follow-through from the commitments or the impressions, maybe, that were given.

The same thing with fall sittings of the Alberta Legislature. Mr. Speaker, I think it was clear that they jumped before they looked when they cancelled the fall sitting. They did not know that they did not have the authority to not have a fall sitting. That is why we are now here for two days, and then we get a month off while they figure out what it is they're going to do.

In fact, there's plenty that they could be talking about. There's a great deal. Our Bill 208 I already mentioned; we could be debating that. We could be debating it today. The government's Education Act is a very comprehensive document. We could be debating that for weeks. There are lots of things.

The promise for fixed election dates should be decided in this Legislature this fall because that's a commitment that the Premier made, and I expect that she will consult with all political parties and will fix an election date before the end of the year so that the other parties know when it's going to be. Mr. Speaker, it's like having a foot race where you all line up and where one person gets to yell go when she's ready regardless of when everyone else is. It's an old-fashioned, antiquated, and unfair system. The Premier promised in her campaign for leadership that she would change that, so I think she has a duty to bring that forward now. We need full sittings.

We need to make sure that we end patronage. I want to say something about the appointment of Gary Mar. I think that that was completely unacceptable. Whether or not he did a good job in Washington and whether or not he has got suitable qualifications to do the job in Hong Kong, it was clearly not a decision made based on careful scrutiny of all of the available candidates and evaluation of their relative skills but a political patronage decision, which conveniently moves a former political opponent out of the province, halfway around the world. I don't think it's something that Albertans really want to see or pay for, for that matter, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, you know, I do accept that the Premier has made some sounds of having a more constructive relationship, and I think that that's welcome. If we can actually develop that based on deeds rather than on promises and we see some real moves in that way, I think that the Premier will find that we will respond. You know, there's an old saying, which I think bears repeating for the Premier: your opponents sit opposite you; your enemies are behind you. I think I'm going to be watching the relationships on the other side very carefully, but I am prepared and my party is prepared to work with the government where we believe they are acting in the best interests of the public and where they are actually genuinely interested in a co-operative dialogue and a relationship. If that is offered, that will be reciprocated.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just conclude by saying that I believe that there are two clear visions in this province. There's the Conservative vision, which has been put forward in the speech, and there's the NDP vision. The Conservative vision is based on favoritism to their friends, it's based on ignoring the environment, and it's based on using education and health care as means to balance a budget. The NDP vision is based on looking after the actual needs of the people and the families of this province, making sure that the environment is clean, that health care and education are delivered consistently year after year to the best possible standard, that we look after small business and we look after farmers, and that we don't allow the kind of cronyism and patronage that has marked this government for so many years.

Those are two very different visions, Mr. Speaker, and I'm looking forward to an opportunity to put those visions forward to the people of Alberta in order to decide what direction our province is going to go.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time.

5:00

The Speaker: I'll now call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on behalf of the Alberta Party.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this

opportunity to address this House on behalf of the Alberta Party and our new leader, Glenn Taylor. He has asked me to bring his greetings to this Assembly and to voice our appreciation for this unique opportunity.

I am privileged to be the first Member of this Legislative Assembly to represent the Alberta Party. I am privileged to be, I think, the fourth Member of this Legislative Assembly this afternoon during these proceedings to congratulate the hon. the Premier on her new job and to say that I look forward to working with her and that I intend to take her at face value in her comments that where we go from here is not a partisan project, that we all sit in the Assembly together for one shared reason: because we believe in Alberta.

We in the Alberta Party believe in working together, in working constructively. We're going to criticize the government when we think the government is wrong. We're going to give the government credit when we think the government is right. We're going to trust that we can do that in an atmosphere of productive debate, a professional, businesslike environment and that it's not going to be personal and that we can continue to work together both behind the scenes and on the floor of this Legislature. I do hope we get the chance to work together on the floor of this Legislature much more in the near future than we have in the near past and the distant past.

I hope that we get to work together this fall on some substantive legislation. It boggles my mind that we are at government Bill 18 and private member's Bill 203 at this point. We should be much farther along in the agenda than we are.

I don't want to make this a half-hour of criticizing the government because there's more to be said and done here than that, I think. There's acknowledgement that there are some very good ideas in this speech. There's also the opportunity, which I would be remiss to ignore, to get our own position and point of view on the record, so I will.

The Alberta Party, Mr. Speaker, is the new kid on the block, named for this province that we all love. It is the party of the future, unencumbered by the ideologies of the past. The Alberta Party will bring hope, intelligence, trust, and better ideas back to our province and back to our government because we are a party that is built on listening and learning and then leading.

Alberta is a great place, but it can be better. That's why we're all here, to make it better. Together we can make it better. Alberta is a great place, but still too many families, too many households in this province are struggling with higher and higher costs of living and increasing debt loads. A debt-burdened society is a risk-averse society, and we cannot allow this culture of debt to endanger our enterprising and entrepreneurial skills. Our economy and our future depend on innovation, courage, and Albertans willing to start new businesses and to create jobs and prosperity.

This is a great place, but we have the highest high school dropout rate in the nation, more than any other province in Canada. We have the resources to ensure that every child completes high school and receives a postsecondary education if they choose to. Alberta is a great place, but we spend more on our health care system with often less satisfactory outcomes than many other provinces in the nation. Alberta is a great place, but our image around the world has been tarred both by our inability to tell our story and, obviously, to act as responsibly as we should have. We know this because the people of Alberta know this and they have told us so.

The Alberta Party will try to transform government because we are committed to an ambitious and authentic program of citizen engagement. We've listened to thousands of Albertans. We did this the slow way, the authentic way, often with small groups of

10 or 12 Albertans in coffee shops, living rooms, local libraries, church basements, and more than the odd pub. We've met face to face, and through the use of innovative technologies we've heard their stories, their challenges, their hopes for the province. We've also asked the citizens of this great province what they were grateful for, living here in Alberta, and they've told us that they live in a beautiful province blessed with an inspiring natural landscape and a proud history of citizenship, community spirit, and entrepreneurialism. They're grateful for the opportunities that this province offers, and they are insistent that we must not squander these opportunities.

Albertans have told us that they want us, their politicians, to work together constructively, much like we all do with our neighbours. Albertans, like all Canadians, know what it means to be a good neighbour. There is nothing like winter here in the Great White North to teach us the value of working together. We're all willing to push or pull our neighbour out of a snowbank or shovel the walkway when our next-door neighbour needs us to. So our hope is that we can bring some of that same energy and co-operative spirit to politics. It's time to do politics differently for the benefit of all Albertans, and I offer that challenge to our new Premier.

The Alberta Party is attracting thousands of Albertans from all regions, urban and rural, and of all ideological backgrounds, including those who have never been involved in any political party before this, because instead of representing a particular segment of the traditional political spectrum, the Alberta Party seeks out the best ideas regardless of whether they're perceived to be from the left, from the right, or from the middle. A good idea is a good idea. Albertans don't define themselves as right or left, and neither do we. If anything, Albertans define themselves as practical, as does the Alberta Party. Traditional parties have focused for far too long in this province on what divides us. We want to focus on the common ground that unites us. This common ground amongst Albertans is often common sense.

Having listened to Albertans and learned from their wisdom, this is how we will lead. On the economy, the Alberta Party recognizes that the development of natural resources is our primary economic vehicle. In order to continue to develop and grow, our resource-based industries need to be effectively leveraged and supported with an eye to future economic growth and challenges. We cannot control the economy. We cannot control the economy here at home within our own borders, nationwide, or, for heaven's sake, around the globe. We have no control over that.

However, we do have the ability to create a favourable business environment. It's time we use the public revenue generated from our resource-based industries today to catalyze a sustainable, profitable, competitive, and diverse economy which provides Alberta businesses access to new markets, research, and innovation.

Kudos to the Premier for recognizing the importance of the Northern Gateway pipeline project and for committing her government to getting behind it and supporting it. It opens up a crucial, key second market for our resources, and it's never good business to only have one customer to sell to.

The Alberta Party will ensure a stable regulatory and royalty environment for our business community to operate in and succeed in while we actively promote a positive brand for our industries globally. We'll insist on best practices that include a strong commitment to environmental stewardship. It's time to actively support the forestry, agriculture, and energy sectors of our economy through broad policy frameworks that encourage value-added products and processing.

We will partner as needed with the industries, enterprises, and businesses already established in Alberta, including most especially small businesses that, as the Premier pointed out, generate 37 per cent of our jobs, an incredible amount of our economic activity, to ensure that they have the capacity to continue to provide jobs and growth through increasing global market intelligence and access for Alberta's entrepreneurs.

Fiscal responsibility begins with smart planning. I think this province has lost its way somewhat when it comes to planning for the future and, thus, isn't able to sustainably pay for its operations and commitments. Yearly budgets fail to reflect the needs and wants of Albertans as they're not properly consulted before budgets are finalized. I commend the Premier for committing her government to consulting with real Albertans before Budget 2012 is written. I believe we said we would do that last spring during the last budget. Good ideas can come from anywhere, and I commend the Premier for borrowing one of ours.

Relying too heavily on nonrenewable resource revenues leaves our economy fragile and subject to the whims of the market when these revenues should be benefiting Albertans now and into the future. The Alberta Party believes smart planning and a proper mix of revenue collection, service funding, saving, and investing is needed in order to adequately offer the programs and services that the people of Alberta expect and deserve from their government now and tomorrow.

What's more, we believe it's time to engage Albertans in an authentic conversation, perhaps the most important conversation we could involve them in right now, about what level of service they would like from their government and how they want to pay for it. Consultation with Albertans is the key to successfully planning for the future, effectively governing on behalf of Albertans, saving and investing for the future, and paying today's bills without running up a deficit and a debt.

It's easy to say that the only way taxes will ever go is down and that there will be no provincial sales tax. I'm not standing here advocating for a provincial sales tax or higher taxes. I'm not even prepared to stand here as I have in the past and advocate for bringing progressivity back to our income tax system.

5:10

What I am advocating for is for government to engage the nearly 4 million Albertans in an authentic adult conversation about the level of service they want from their government and what they're prepared to pay for it and what they're prepared to give up if they want low taxes and high service. Because right now we have that. Health care is a good example. I'll touch on that in a second, Mr. Speaker. Through a collaborative and consultative process the Alberta Party will commit to discussing with Albertans the plethora of options available to cover the cost of services, including user fees and premiums, alternative revenue collection, program cuts, and a complete review of our taxation system while committing to maintaining Alberta as the lowest tax jurisdiction in the nation.

Now I want to talk about health care for a moment because it's on every Albertan's mind. We know that. It is necessary to build and we will build a health system that focuses on keeping people healthy, that strives to keep people out of the hospital. Of course, we need a medical system that is accessible and responds quickly when people become ill or injured and need to be in the hospital, but our focus on making sick and injured people better has become a focus on acute care rather than health protection and promotion, disease and injury prevention, management of chronic conditions, and long-term care.

Publicly funded universal health care in Canada is an idea that was born on the prairies. The Alberta Party believes it can be perfected here. Albertans should have the best health care system in the country, if not the world, and if we all pull together, we can achieve this. The Alberta Party emphasizes prevention as a means for ensuring the sustainability of our publicly funded health system. We acknowledge that health demands will increase in the future, and currently prevention, unbelievably, is only 1 per cent of the health care budget.

We also emphasize primary care, the right to have a family doctor, accessibility, and a strong mental health strategy. Chronic illness is the most common form of illness and very expensive to treat. Injuries are a leading cause of hospitalization among Albertans and often require expensive treatment and rehab; however, many injuries and chronic illnesses are largely preventable. Simple and relatively inexpensive initiatives like improving the enforcement of workplace safety standards can go a long way towards reducing the frequency of injuries and illness and lessening their human and financial burdens.

The Alberta Party will also create a school health policy that integrates nutrition and healthy living into Alberta's school curriculum. Our vision for the future of health care in Alberta is a vision that ensures that everybody has a family doctor and is able to easily access a primary care network. When people can see their family doc, a nurse practitioner, or some other health professional, they can identify and treat problems before they become worse, minimizing recovery times, preventing the system from having to provide more expensive levels of care.

The Alberta Party will invest in expanding access to high-quality home care and continuing care. Acute-care beds in hospitals are very expensive, up to \$3,000 per bed per day, yet many patients in these beds, as my honoured colleagues who have spoken before me today have referenced, are only there because they're waiting for beds in other parts of the system such as long-term care, palliative care, mental health care, and they're waiting a long, long time. Many could even be cared for at home if we had better support systems in place for their families. Increasing support for home care and continuing care is better for Albertans. It gives seniors and their families more of a say over their living arrangements and is much less expensive for our health system.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize and appreciate the hon. the Premier's commitment to ensuring a full, open, public judicial inquiry into the alleged intimidation of health care professionals in Alberta. Sunlight is a great disinfectant, and Albertans are looking for more. There are, I guess, two ways of looking at public inquiries. One is that they cost a lot of money. They may not uncover a lot of problems or wrongdoing. That way almost presumes that you can only justify the cost of an inquiry if it produces X number of incidents of wrongdoing per Y number of dollars spent. But the other way of looking at public inquiries is this. Sometimes they are the only means of re-establishing the public's trust in an institution brought into question. We think it's pretty important that the people be able to trust that the health care system on which they collectively spend nearly \$15 billion a year and on which they literally stake their lives is doing its work properly.

In many ways this province, Mr. Speaker, has some of the most progressive and forward-thinking environmental initiatives in the world. This is thanks in part to our municipal governments. The city of Edmonton, for instance: world-class waste management and a plan to preserve and promote farmland and urban agriculture. Medicine Hat: the city is using revenues from its natural gas royalties to support families in putting solar panels on

their homes. Okotoks: the town has reduced its water consumption by a third and its greenhouse gas emissions by one-fifth.

The province needs to learn from our municipal governments when it comes to environmental stewardship. We must stand up for this province with more than words and expensive taxpayer-funded ad campaigns. The rubber must hit the road. The provincial government can learn from our civic government brethren. They're showing leadership, and we need to be humble enough to follow. Good ideas, I repeat, can come from anywhere, and we must never be so proud that we will not or cannot build on those ideas to build a better Alberta for the next generation.

A rich and diverse environment comes with the responsibility of properly protecting, sensibly utilizing, and respectfully appreciating Alberta's natural heritage. With good governance, meaningful and collaborative decision-making, and effective leadership the Alberta Party believes we can advance our resource economy while at the same time honouring and preserving our unique natural ecosystem. The Alberta Party believes that the improved stewardship of all water resources, responsible development of land, high air quality, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions are all eminently achievable in Alberta if we have the will to achieve those goals.

The Alberta Party believes that the citizens of this province, business, and government working together can make the province environmentally healthier and economically more prosperous at the same time. We envision a future in which integrated environment and energy policies are developed with input from industry and the people of Alberta, where water is viewed as a public good that is responsibly shared among all Albertans and conserved as a matter of course, where a land-use policy is founded upon a sustainable balance of development and conservation, reclamation, and restoration.

Over the years this province's energy sector has created immense value for our province and prosperity for our people. These benefits will continue only if our energy sector keeps pace with and adapts to the demands of a rapidly changing world. Alberta is in the enviable position of having the potential to be the world leader in developing a sustainable energy sector, combining the best sources and practices of our existing energy industry with innovative and creative renewable forms of energy. Alberta can be at the leading edge of the green energy future by building on the current strengths of a healthy oil and gas industry. The Alberta Party recognizes the need for an innovative energy sector, a robust economy, and a healthy environment. Indeed, these are not three separate discussions in Alberta; they are the conversation.

In the past, activity in our energy sector has created huge spinoff benefits, but often those benefits accrue elsewhere. We want to keep more of these benefits here at home in our local communities. It also benefits Albertans when the energy sector produces a higher valued product for export to markets. Can we upgrade a hundred per cent of our bitumen? Would market conditions allow us to do that? No, probably not. Even if market conditions would, is it in our best interests in terms of environmental protection and the preservation of our scarce water supplies to do it all? No, it isn't, but we should do more than we do today.

Becoming and remaining a world leader in energy requires a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. Entrepreneurship means we're able to recognize opportunity. Innovation allows us to respond to a changing world. This begins with building on our existing strengths and systematically supporting innovation in education, research, technology, business development, and environmental science within the energy sector.

Our democracy, our communities, and our economy depend on education, innovation, and creativity, and Alberta must use its wealth to fund what is most important. To our party education is the foundation of our future, and our children are the hope for our future, so why not give our hope that foundation that they need? We commend the Premier for belatedly restoring the funding cut from education. We condemn the government for putting our students in this position in the first place.

The Alberta Party vision for the future of Alberta recognizes that education is more than just grades and exams. Education means equipping Albertans for the world ahead of them as our society shifts and adapts to new technologies. Our education system must absorb these changes. A strong school system produces successful and creative citizens who are proactive in this ever-changing and diverse society.

The Alberta Party envisions an education system in which schools are adequately funded and are at the heart of the community, the local school boards are responsible for decisions regarding their schools, spending habits are transparent to the public, and teachers are trusted to teach to the needs of the students, not to the provincial exam. Alberta needs to become a leader in education and learning. This means prioritizing skill development in the areas of critical thinking and problem solving; creativity and innovation; social responsibility; cultural, global, and environmental awareness; communication; digital literacy; self-direction; personal management; collaboration and leadership; and, ultimately, lifelong learning.

5:20

The Alberta Party has a new vision that reconnects the communities of Alberta to a common dream while respecting and admiring the local creativity and local way of life that give our province the richness that we cherish. Strong communities are the building blocks of a successful province, and municipalities are the vehicles through which we build them. Local government is closest to the people, and it is their actions that most closely affect all our daily lives. An Alberta Party government will recognize municipalities as a true order of government and foster a new partnership based on mutual respect.

The Alberta Party will respect the taxes people are asked to pay, and we will invest those dollars to ensure our communities are safe, that necessary infrastructure is built and maintained, and that each municipality can achieve its most sustainable and creative form.

Albertans have shared their hopes with us that this province can continue to be a place of economic creativity and strength and that our enterprising spirit can be used to leverage the opportunity we have today while building our province for the 21st century. They've told us they want a vibrant, diversified economy to create a sustainable future not just within the energy industry but in all other sectors, including the arts, forestry, agriculture, and the innovative technologies of this century to come.

It's time to turn our province back into a place of ideas, where debate is welcomed and our citizens are inspired to create a bright future for their families, their communities, and the province. The Alberta Party is committed to partnerships that respect who we are as Albertans. We're committed to a fiscally responsible financial climate, that benefits each one of us. We must use public dollars as effectively and efficiently as possible, we must balance the books to mitigate the effects of boom and bust, and we must set aside money for a rainy day.

Albertans want a government that chooses to inspire and demand the best from our public service rather than asking for mediocrity and holding hiring freezes or layoffs over their heads.

The Alberta Party is committed to making this province unquestionably the best place in the world to live and to keep raising that bar to commit to continuous improvement in making this province the best place in the world to live. We want to create a province that young people are proud to live in, are committed to stay in, will grow old and die in, and will die happy.

The Alberta Party is committed to building a province that is committed to a new democracy and new partnerships, one where we're not afraid of the voices of citizens but where we seek out their voices at every opportunity so that all hands can help build this great province and make it a progressive, forward-thinking, 21st- and maybe even 22nd-century province.

It's time for all of us to be inspired and to demand more of ourselves. It's time for change, time for leadership, and it's time to act. You earn the right to govern every four or five years, but the trust of the people has to be won every day. We listen, we learn, and then we lead. That's the Alberta Party, and that's our vision for the future of this great province, this province that we love, this province that our party is named for.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. member, and thank you very much, hon. member, as well.

We've now concluded round 1, and we will drop off the list of future speakers a representative from the Alberta Party because there's no one else to participate in the six minutes remaining.

My brief notes suggest the following, and they may be out by a couple of seconds: there are 24 minutes still available for participation by a member of the government caucus, 28 minutes for participation by a member of the Official Opposition, 22 minutes left for any remaining participants of the Wildrose Party, and 12 minutes left for participation by the ND caucus.

May I ask if there's an additional speaker from the government caucus?

Then I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to participate.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege for me to rise. This is, after all, an emergency debate, and I was – okay. I'll change my opening here. This is a vital issue, and it's good to see so many of us here in the Assembly to partake and to participate. I thought I would start by going page by page through the speech that was delivered by the Premier and making some comments that I think are consistent with our own caucus policy and with my own beliefs. Some of them are favourable, and some of them are real concerns.

I'll start right off from almost at the beginning, where the Premier states, I think, something that's pretty obvious. She says, "We have an astounding wealth of resources, more than enough to sustain our families and crown our communities." I couldn't agree more. I've felt for a long time – and I've done the math to support my hunch – that Alberta is almost certainly the richest place on Earth.

That's led me to some serious questioning because given the incredible wealth in Alberta, given the fact that per capita we really are the richest place on Earth, why is it that we're debating about cutbacks? Why is it that just a few weeks ago we had to scramble under the new Premier to find a hundred million dollars to reinstate funding for teachers? Why is it that even according to the government's own business plan some 50 per cent of Alberta's roads are in moderate or poor condition? Why is it that we have the highest tuition rates? There are profound questions here that all of us need to think about. If we really do have the wealth that

the Premier indicates in her speech we have, why aren't we managing better? Why are we struggling so much?

She then goes on to say in her speech on page 2:

We must shield Alberta from the hazards of the challenging times in which we live . . . We must offer high quality and far-reaching public services. And we must preserve the province's finances.

I think I can speak on behalf of all the Alberta Liberal caucus that we will support this Legislature and this government in pursuing those kinds of goals.

On page 3 towards the bottom of the page the Premier talks about unfortunate nations, and I want to quote her correctly here. "Unfortunate nations spent too much and took in too little." She's referring there to the current economic crisis in Europe. You could add the United States to that list and perhaps a number of other countries. I think what's striking there is the balance, the implied balance: spent too much and took in too little. I'm glad both sides of that equation are in this speech because I think over and over we hear a noisy, noisy discourse about spending too much, and we hear almost nothing about taking in too little.

The previous Finance minister, who delivered the budget speech last spring, spoke about Alberta being able to increase its revenues by \$11 billion and still be the lowest taxed province in Canada. We have to ask ourselves: is it wise to leave that much money on the table? Is it wise to be \$11 billion lower than the next lowest taxing jurisdiction when we can't top up the heritage fund, when we can't give reliable funding to so many of our services? Are we really being wise here?

It would have been nice – and I would encourage the Premier to do this – to genuinely open a debate. Issue a white paper, for example. Stir up the public on the debate about: what is the right balance in Alberta between spending and revenue? It's a legitimate debate, with many different views. Let's open it up. Let's have it go on.

At the top of page 4 the Premier in her speech said: "Alberta has no net debt. We have \$5,700 in assets per person and the highest credit rating available." Actually, she understates things there. It's true that Alberta has no net debt and that we have, as she implies here, significant assets, but she limits her assets here to essentially the government's cash assets. I would like to challenge this government – and I challenge the Energy minister and the Finance minister to do this – to treat Alberta's assets the same way that Imperial Oil treats its assets on its books. Do the accounting in this government that you will see if you go through the financial reports of the corporations. What am I getting out there? Count all our assets and most particularly our oil and gas assets that are still in the ground. After all, if it's good enough for Imperial Oil and for all kinds of other corporate entities, surely it's good enough for us. After all, we do own it.

5:30

It's easy to forget, but we as the citizens of Alberta, we the government of Alberta actually own – what is it? – about 170 billion barrels' equivalent of oil and gas. If you do the math, even if you value that in the ground, a net present value of \$5 a barrel – Imperial Oil values theirs, I think, at \$10 a barrel on the books; remember that oil, I think, today got close to 90 bucks again – it's something like \$840 billion that we own and that if we were a private corporation, we would put on our books. I think that this government should do the same thing, and that \$5,700 number would soar. It would also give the people of Alberta a much clearer sense of what's actually at stake.

I would encourage this Premier to do that.

Ms Blakeman: Transparency.

Dr. Taft: Transparency. It's just a matter, really, of keeping up to what's common practice in the private sector.

I was encouraged when I read on page 5 where the Premier talks about "supporting a strong social network to protect our most vulnerable. We are committed to maintaining programs and services for vulnerable Albertans while ensuring long-term program sustainability."

I was discouraged that she didn't explore more detail there. We actually leave an awful lot of our most vulnerable citizens out of the picture. As many of you who've been in here over the years have heard me say, every day in Alberta thousands of kids – little kids, five, six, seven, eight years old – go to school hungry through no fault of their own, and alone among all the provinces this government provides no particular funding for helping those kids.

I was in a school just a couple of weeks ago in northeast Edmonton, and as I've seen done at a school in Lethbridge, the teachers and various charities provide toast and Cheez Whiz so that the kids can sit through a class without falling asleep or without being so distracted by their own hunger.

It sure would have been nice to have seen some commitment to actually expanding programs and services for vulnerable Albertans in this speech. We have after all expanded services for all kinds of perhaps less vulnerable interests, whether that might be the oil and gas sector, for example, with \$3 billion, I think, in subsidies in the last three years, or whether it's various agriculture subsidies or all kinds of other things. Let's be serious about looking after our vulnerable people.

I took some heart when I heard the Premier say, as she did on page 6 of her speech, that this government was going to proceed with health care plans "without commercializing it or compromising our values." All of us in the Alberta Liberal caucus are strongly opposed to commercializing health care for all kinds of reasons. It turns out that in this particular case good morality, good ethics, good health care, and good economics all converge.

The evidence is overwhelming that commercialized health care not only is unethical, picking people for care according to how much they can pay, but it's also inefficient because it drives up costs. There's a lot, an overwhelming amount, of evidence to that, and I think anybody in this Assembly, on all sides of the Assembly, have at least a gut sense of that when they look at commercial health care in the United States. I'm glad we've made that commitment, but you can rest assured that under our leader and backed up by all our caucus we will go to whatever length is necessary to hold the government to account on that particular promise.

I was struck about the examples used for health care, glamour examples – the heart surgery, the high-tech catheterizations, and so on – when what we really need in Alberta for better health care is to address issues of mental health. We need to address prevention and primary care. I will urge the minister of health to focus on those things. Don't get seduced by the chrome and mirrors of all the high-tech equipment and all the millions of dollars we can spend per patient in some cases when we can do so much more so much more effectively. I think this minister of health maybe gets that. I'll be checking to see.

One of the most effective ways of improving the health of Alberta is to reduce poverty, and we will be pursuing that kind of agenda aggressively.

I did get concerned, and I thought, "My goodness, there's a kind of contradiction in this speech" when on page 6 we're talking about health care "without commercializing it," and then on page

7 we're talking about a whole new system of continuing care through public-private partnerships. Then on the top of page 8 I was startled and, frankly, dismayed when I read a quote. Well, it's not a quote yet; I'll set this up properly for *Hansard*. The government will be "allowing private industry to meet seniors' needs." Then it goes on to say that that "will create more jobs in many different sectors and steady growth for our economy." Now, that sentence is loaded with so many problems that I could probably fill the rest of this speech just on that one sentence, but I know not everybody would appreciate that.

Allowing private industry to meet seniors' needs is exactly the wrong direction to go, and we know that. We have a whole nation that illustrates that to us south of the border. Turning our seniors, our most vulnerable people on fixed incomes, over to private industry to meet their needs is a recipe for pain and cost and suffering and injustice. You can bet the Alberta Liberals will fight this tooth and nail. We should not be turning our seniors into a commodity. We should be there for them as vulnerable citizens. Further, this sentence then goes on, and instead of talking about meeting seniors' needs through a better system, it talks about meeting seniors' needs in order to create more jobs and to cause steady growth for our economy. Well, where does that lead us?

You know who has the most rapid growth in their health care sector in the world? The United States. One of the biggest drains on the American economy is their health care system, yet they have come to depend on the health care system as one of the very, very few sectors that's growing, that's creating jobs. They're in kind of a black hole, a downward spiral, where the more they pour into their commercial private-sector health care, the weaker their economy gets and then the more they depend on that, the economics of health care. Health care should not become a job-creation industry. It should never be seen in that regard. As you as a government begin doing that, you are leading us towards a cliff from which we will not be able to hold back.

I was struck by the line on page 8 of the speech where the Premier spoke about "64 per cent of all workers 25 and up reporting post-secondary credentials." I'm the critic for this area, and I'm pleased, as I'm sure we're all pleased, that Alberta has a highly educated workforce, but we have to remember that a disproportionate number of those people were trained outside of Alberta. Some people will say: well, how can we have such a low high school completion rate, the lowest postsecondary participation rate in Canada, yet one of the most highly educated workforces? It's because that workforce is getting trained at Dalhousie and McGill and Ryerson and at BCIT and so on, and they're moving here.

5:40

In fact, I was at an economic symposium about 10 days ago at the university, and there was an estimate that Alberta gets a transfer of value just through education alone of well over a billion dollars a year because all those other provincial governments pour money into training the workforce that comes here. Good for us; that's how a portable workforce works. But let's remember. Let's not confuse ourselves that we're doing such a great job at training these people. They're coming from somewhere else.

The most exciting thing, the best thing for me – I've haven't had a chance to confer on this with my caucus colleagues – was on page 9. I want to give the government marks here. "We will put the entire education system on a three-year funding plan, ending uncertainty over budgets and providing schools with the resources they need to meet demand from a growing population." Great idea. I'm sure that we will support that in this caucus. Let's get

our government services off the roller coaster ride of funding cuts and uncertainty, and let's give them stability. Another thing this government did well, since I'm giving out bouquets here, was to give five-year funding to the health care system. Good moves.

I want to go to page 10 now and reflect on a quote here that I suspect has more truth in it than perhaps the Premier knew when she read it. The quote is this: "The most enduring prosperity is spread as widely as possible." That cuts to the core of inequality and the unrelenting increase in equality in Alberta and in Canada and in the western world.

A few years ago the TD Bank published a series of three papers over about four years where they spoke about the western tiger. In one of those they addressed inequality in Calgary, and they produced a startling figure, that 42 per cent of Calgarians were living on \$20,000 a year or less. Calgary actually had a larger portion of low-income people than other Canadian cities and a larger portion of high-income people than other Canadian cities. We need to address that inequality, or we will end up in the same kind of social turbulence that we're seeing in the rest of the developed world. We can do it. Let's feed those hungry school kids. Let's set out a coherent plan to eliminate poverty in the richest place on Earth, and we will all benefit.

It's not just about being nice to poor people; it's about being good for a whole society. So when the Premier says that "the most enduring prosperity is spread as widely as possible," I hope all of you in the government caucus understand what she's getting at there. That's a vitally important value.

I will flip over a few pages. I was concerned and I am concerned about the enormous concentration on the energy sector in this speech. Clearly, we all understand that the energy sector drives this province. Half of the economy of Alberta is driven directly or indirectly by the energy sector, but for a while I was concerned, as I heard the Premier talk so much about the energy sector, that this government was going to abandon any attempts at diversification. Some of the points in here just reinforce that for me.

She spoke about, for example, on page 9: "To enhance our leadership role further, this government will negotiate externships – competitive placements for talented young Albertans with energy-focused organizations around the globe." I wondered: why only energy? Why don't we send some of our filmmakers to Hollywood or to Bollywood? Why don't we send some of our architects to Dubai or to London or to New York? Why aren't we creating externships in all of those programs? Why only energy? Again, at least let's have that debate. There is a case to be made: we'll put all our eggs in one basket and then look after them very closely. But there is at least an equal case to be made to spread our risks, to grow other industries, to bring the world talent here that we want.

When I got to page 13, I thought the Premier was simply being over the top when she said, "This government will work to make Alberta a dominant global supplier in an increasingly hungry world." Now, I could have accepted important or vibrant or vital. But dominant? Come on, folks. We're not going to dominate world global agricultural markets. We don't have the resources. We don't have the land mass. You know, we think Canada is a huge exporter of grain. France, I think, exports more grain than Canada. Our herd of cattle – I'm sitting here beside somebody who probably has the exact numbers. Alberta's cattle herd is a fraction of many states in the United States, not to mention Brazil or Argentina or Australia.

We're not ever going to be dominant global suppliers in agriculture. Let's be realistic. We can be focused, effective, significant, but there's no way in the world we're going to

dominate agriculture. If there is, I want to see . . . [interjections] I'm getting heckled from some of the ministers over there. Put your money where your mouth is. Put the studies on the floor of this Assembly that show that Alberta is going to dominate the world in agricultural production.

An Hon. Member: Quality over quantity.

Dr. Taft: Quality over quantity.

Why don't we become, you know, like Kona coffee? There are barely a few thousand acres of coffee production in Hawaii, but the people on the Big Island have established Kona as a premium brand. They don't dominate world coffee production, but it's a premium brand. Let's do that for Alberta's agricultural products. Let's talk about quality.

I also wanted to comment on page 14, where the Premier said, "This government will go to the wall for Alberta's agricultural sector and ensure our farmers are the best in the world." Now, I have no problem with going to the wall for farmers, but I thought it was important to note the phrasing here. It says, "Go to the wall for Alberta's agricultural sector." And I'm thinking: well, what part of that are we going to go to the wall for? Tyson Foods? Are we going to go to the wall for Cargill? We actually have in the past. We know that under the BSE bailout the big winners were the multinationals. I don't particularly want to go to the wall for huge, multinational corporations, but I will go to the wall for the little farmer from Rimbey or Battle River or Sexsmith. I could do that, but let's get a little detail here.

It also left me wondering: who else will this Premier go to the wall for? I return to that hungry kid who sat in the classroom just a few hours ago today, without food and caught in an impoverished, dysfunctional family. Will the Premier go to the wall for that kid? Will you as a government caucus go to the wall for those kids? Will you go to the wall to protect the environment? Will you go to the wall to build the heritage fund, to get our finances in order? Who are you? Who is this Premier prepared to go to the wall for?

5:50

I think we should perhaps wrap up by addressing some of the values that were and were not spoken to in this speech. On page 16 the Premier spoke perhaps the only time in this speech about core values. She says, "Entrepreneurship is one of our core values and this government will promote it." I'm okay with that. Entrepreneurship is great. I come from a family of entrepreneurs, and I'm involved in various entrepreneurial activities myself. But I wanted to hear about more core values from this Premier.

Let's ask ourselves as Albertans: what are our other core values? What about fairness? Is it fair when some people benefit so much and some are left so far behind? Is it fair that somebody suicidal from mental health has to sit in an emergency room or somebody needing education can't get education because tuition fees are high? What about the core value of fairness? What about democracy? Some of the other speakers here challenged this Premier to address the core values of democracy, compassion, human rights, diversity.

It would have been nice if this speech had actually begun and ended with values rather than beginning and ending with finances. That's pretty much what this Premier did. She began and ended with finances. Page 16: "Our wealth and freedom depend on the individual right to free enterprise." It depends on so much more than that: rule of law, social stability, education, infrastructure, reliable electricity. On page 17 – and I'll wrap up here, Mr. Speaker – I just cannot buy this. "All our plans for a stronger Alberta must come back to finance."

I want to leave you with something. Is money the foundation of everything this government is going to do? Is it really the case that all our plans for a stronger Alberta come down to money?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a proud province, and there is so much the people of this wonderful province can be proud of. Nowhere else in this country have I met people as generous in spirit and as kind in heart. When facing difficult economic horizons, Albertans remain hard working. They remain compassionate. They remain tough and resilient. They know that the greatness of this province will continue to be built by the people who live here. We work hard, and, yes, we play hard, but when the going gets tough, we dig in our heels and do what we need to survive. They don't believe in a government that thinks that they know best, that centralizes decision-making and is more concerned about rewarding their pals than putting the interests of Albertans first.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about what the people of Alberta want versus what the government tells them they want. This is so clear in the Premier's speech today by the number of times that we saw the word "we" being used. Albertans want their province to be fiscally responsible and to not spend more than we have and plunge our province into debt. They don't believe in higher taxes, bigger spending, and more government. Albertans don't want a government that gives itself a raise behind closed doors. They want to be in charge of handling the salaries of their elected officials and not the other way around.

Albertans want their government to be open, transparent, and accountable to them, to represent the roles of the elected MLAs and give them a free vote in the Legislature. What they really don't want is a government that warns Alberta of the worsening economic climate and then, Mr. Speaker, takes three weeks off to avoid tough questions and important debate. Albertans want a government that will listen to the issues and concerns and act for them and not for that government's interest.

Albertans want more from their health care system. They want a health care system where everyone has a family doctor and they don't wait months and months to see a specialist and wait even longer for surgery. Albertans want a health care system that allows health care professionals to speak openly and freely about the concerns they see, on how to improve the system, without a gag order being imposed on them.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want our seniors to move seamlessly through the system when they can't take care of themselves anymore. They want our seniors to have home care when they need it, assisted living when they need it, and long-term care when they need it. Albertans do not want our seniors to have to pay for a bath, to pay for someone to push their wheelchair to a dining room to eat. Albertans are proud of our seniors and believe we need to take care of them. What Albertans don't want is gobbledygook coming from the government about their continuing care model, where they have developed a system that cannot meet our seniors' needs, and they nickel and dime them to death.

Albertans know that in a province with no shortage of innovation and determination they can lead all of Canada in the quality of health care received, but they are tired of the government's talking points and want to see tangible results for themselves and their families. Albertans want mental health beds along with beds available for those suffering with alcohol and drug addiction. They want health professionals to be there when

they are needed. Albertans don't want to be told that there are no beds available and that they need to come back in a few weeks just to see a psychiatrist or a counsellor.

Albertans want our most vulnerable, our children, to be taken care of and for assistance to be available when emergencies hit. They especially want to make sure that these children are given stronger protection against victimization and crimes in their communities. Albertans want our social care workers to be able to manage their caseloads and be able to spend the time and the effort needed when taking care of our families when they are in crisis. Albertans want our foster families to be treated with respect and compensated fairly when they step up to the plate and to help our children and families when they are in time of need.

Albertans want us to recognize the nonprofit agencies in this province and the wonderful job they do on behalf of Albertans in our province. They want to make sure they receive a predictable funding formula year after year instead of being subject to an erratic supply of funds.

So why don't we start listening to Albertans when times get tough instead of turning a deaf ear to their concerns? They are the ones who feed life into our democratic institutions. They are the ones who make this province great. They are the ones we were sent here to represent. Let's make sure that their voices are heard. Albertans want their province to lead in troubled times, to reach out to those who need it, and to show others across this great country that in tough economic times we know what we're doing and that we are proactive instead of reactive. Albertans want to stimulate this economy the Alberta way, through lowering taxes, through balancing the books by prioritizing spending on front-line services, through less regulation and, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, by less government altogether.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans love this province. What Albertans don't love is a government that has lost its way.

The Speaker: I'll call on an hon. member from the ND caucus.

There being none, I'll call on the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. There are 15 minutes, 41 seconds remaining on the clock.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, I congratulate the leader of the PC Party for being selected as the leader and, of course, as Premier, representing the 30,000-some votes she did receive. Of course, we do have a province of over 3.5 million Albertans, and clearly it will be interesting in the next election in terms of how Albertans, our true bosses, speak when it comes to how and who will represent them in the government.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, today truly was a Speech from the Throne as opposed to what it was described as. That being the case, it really, I guess, is politics, but we accept that, and we play by the rules of the majority of this government, this PC government of 40 years.

6:00

Mr. Speaker, over the past many months the Wildrose has been doing a lot of consulting with Albertans but, more importantly, doing a lot of listening, not telling Albertans but actually listening to Albertans. I do know that in all political parties, including the government, many of the MLAs are listening to their constituents because they know that they are their bosses and they give them their jobs. So I salute all Albertans, 3.5 million, who give everyone in this House their job. The question is: who remembers that, and who forgets it? I guess that's the real issue that we will all be judged on in this next election: did you represent the

political party, the entire party line, or did you actually listen to your constituents?

The Wildrose has been doing this for the past several months across this province. And they've been speaking loud and clear, telling us what they are tired of and also what they're worn out of in terms of the numerous tricks by the government. The state of Alberta is promising, and the future of this province is promising. It's based on ideas we've received from businesses and people and senior citizens. The wisdom that senior citizens bring to this party is significant.

I meet with citizens each and every week. I like to have open office hours where you don't have to make an appointment. I challenge all MLAs to do the same, where you can sit in your office and actually have a coffee without an appointment. It's based on first-come, first-served, kind of almost like an emergency room where you come in, and if there's nothing of a more pressing nature ahead of you, you will be actually listened to and dealt with.

Mr. Speaker, really, what this government lacks is new ideas. The fact is that after 40 years it's grown old and tired even though they do have a few young members on that side. I congratulate some of the new members of the cabinet. I'm sure they're excited. Their adrenalin must be booming. I know that there are some members who wanted to be ministers of other certain things. I saw on television where some members said that they would like to be the Minister of Education versus the minister of this and that. But it's all good. It's good ideas because at the end of the day we want to serve. Everyone in this House wants to serve.

Let's talk for a moment about new ideas. New ideas are like a newborn child. They have to be fed; they have to be nurtured. They have to be protected, the new ideas. They have to be given a chance to grow. We celebrate in the Wildrose caucus the opportunity to listen to Albertans, our true bosses, and the opportunity to allow an idea to grow. That is so important. What happens, though, in a dynasty of 40 years of a PC Party? The actual party and the system they have is more powerful than one MLA, and what happens is that you lose the connection with your bosses, your constituents. Now, there are many on the government side who continue to try to listen to their constituents, and I salute you. You are listening to your constituents. Good for you. They are your bosses, not someone who has a fancy title as a minister or a fancy title like Premier or Government House Leader. You actually report to your citizens, and I congratulate you for that.

Mr. Speaker, as we go forward, I would like to say that I believe that the next election will be built on new ideas, ideas that we hear from our constituents. Allow me to say that as I sit here today, I proudly say that it is an honour and a privilege to serve. In order to serve, you have to listen. Listening is so important because of the wisdom that senior citizens, in fact, have brought to me. I stood here three years ago with the then Premier from Vegreville who promised the seniors of Fort McMurray a long-term care centre. He stood right beside me when he announced it, and then he broke the promise. That just doesn't cut it in any constituency when you make a commitment to senior citizens to build a long-term care centre, and the then minister, now the Minister of Finance, says: "No. We're going to cut that for another five years because the average age is too young."

Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago I was asked by the family to be a pallbearer for a senior citizen who stayed in an acute-care bed in our hospital in Fort McMurray along with 65 others. She passed away. She was 103 years old. She never complained because she was a hard-working Albertan. She didn't know that there are actually better facilities out there that other Albertans are

enjoying, but she did know that there could have been one in Fort McMurray, based on a commitment.

I'm sorry for the fact that I was not able to live up to that commitment when I was part of that government, but I proudly can say that I can look myself in the mirror. Ultimately, that lady who was 103 years old, as I carried her coffin out, I will say that not ever for a moment did her family complain. They never complained. They never criticized the Premier or anyone in his government. They said she'd lived a good life.

It's a humbling story, and I know that all of us in this room know that we can do better. We want to fulfill our commitments. So, Mr. Speaker, I say that I apologize to the family of that senior citizen because I know that we can all do better. As our licence plate says, welcome to wild rose country as we go forward into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. Eight minutes and 13 seconds, sir.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to get up and participate in this emergency debate, which does not seem to quite reach that level of what I'd call emergency debate. I want to congratulate the new Premier on her stunning victory to become the first woman Premier in the province here. Truly it was exciting to see at least a few Albertans decide to engage in that process and want to participate by spending their \$5 to vote on that.

Alberta is a province with a vast potential to lead the way for all Canadians in the years moving forward. We are truly blessed with incredible individuals that are hard workers. We have beautiful land that is clean and productive, that produces some of the best food in the world. We have clean water. We have clean air. We truly are blessed with resources that are second to none. However, I think that each and every one of us in here understands and realizes that the real reason we're blessed and able to develop these resources is because it takes good government that respects the rule of law in order for those opportunities to be fully developed.

When facing economic headwinds like these, it is critical that we lead and return to a balanced budget and be the example and the beacon of hope for all the provinces in our Confederation and, indeed, all of the countries around the world. The new Premier responded a little bit and talked about the economic problems, which again is what the emergency debate is supposed to be about yet was not really addressed in any true sense. We had some warm, wonderful words, some direction that she's talking about, but I truly question what her intent is and the direction that she's going to lead the province of Alberta.

Again, what she's demonstrated over this last week is that she doesn't respect the rule of law. She doesn't respect democracy. She set off and said that, well, we're not going to sit. The first thing she said when she got elected was that we're not going to sit. Then she talks to caucus and says: okay, we need to sit. Then it's just for two days.

We have a commission, the AUC, that was bringing forward their report today, which she suspended. So here we have commissions and boards that are being instructed by the province to produce these reports, and then they're squashed. I think she would be appalled if she saw that going on in some of the other countries where she's gone to promote democracy. Instead, though, what we see: this government is more concerned about interfering and micromanaging our markets here and wanting to pick what I want to call economic losers rather than allowing the competition and the free market to develop that. We see that in many areas.

Instead, they're busy promoting a wasteful program like spending \$2 billion on carbon capture and storage. This is not the proper answer to what we need. We need to promote the responsible development of our oil sands. We need to ensure that the Northern Gateway pipeline is our top priority. She talked about it, but is it her top priority? I don't think so.

No democratic accountability. Again, the House is going to recess for three weeks so that they can go out and rejig. Let's ask: why has this problem developed? Because of this government's poor timing on when they wanted to pick a new Premier. They knew that the House sat on October 24. They knew that way back in January when they were trying to set up the schedule to say that this is what we're going to do. They created this problem and then say: oh, we need some more time. No. What they need is some more competency, which they are lacking incredibly.

6:10

Our new Premier continues to plunge into our savings accounts for such simple things as a patronage appointment for her political rival, who was far exceeding her on the first popular vote, before they went back to the people to have a popularity contest. We'll spend, you know, \$260,000-plus a year when what we really should be doing is focusing and promoting our pipeline that gets our oil to Asia and India.

As we have witnessed the controversy over the Keystone pipeline, we no longer want to be beholden to the U.S. or the EU, who seem to show their desire to buy from dictatorships that have no problem supporting terrorism around the world. These areas that they want to claim as a better place to buy oil and gas don't even allow their women to vote. They don't allow them to go out in public and show their faces, yet we listen to the EU and the U.S. put a black eye on our wonderful province and our development of our oil sands.

This is an area that should've been focused on. Gary Mar said he'd be down in Ottawa on the 7th of October to fight for that Keystone pipeline, but he fell silent. But the Northern Gateway pipeline to the Pacific coast is a necessity for this province and for our country. Are we going to maximize our revenue from our resources, or are we going to be held captive to a market that wants to badmouth us on one side and yet take their oil from other states that are far more brutal and, again, barbaric in their production of oil?

We can do better, but this government is more interested in controlling and claiming credit when they have little to do with the economic prosperity that we enjoy. More often than not the entrepreneurs and the businessmen that excel in this province do it despite this government's policies rather than being enhanced by this government's policies.

Albertans deserve better. Right now we're paying for more bloated bureaucracies and individuals going to Asia and more red tape that stifles the Alberta entrepreneur. If this government is serious about improving the state of our economy, they need to stop meddling in the lives of everyday Albertans and our businesses. This government needs to begin to apply common-market principles and to begin to capitalize on the Alberta spirit and competition in an open and competitive market, the same Alberta spirit and entrepreneurial ingenuity that allowed us to unlock the oil sands and apply it to our prosperity.

We have many problems and challenges that this Premier has failed to address at this point. I just want to touch briefly on health care. Right now Albertans are paying the highest per capita of anywhere in the developed world yet getting some of the poorest results in those areas. It's very disappointing that the Premier has not addressed what we're going to do on that. Albertans agree on universal access for health, but they are tired of a health care system that operates in the same manner as North Korea and Cuba instead of applying practical European model solutions based on the competitive delivery of health care services. For too long this government and their progressive pals in the NDP and the Liberals have gotten away with fearmongering vulnerable Albertans about implementing the necessary reforms to fix our health care.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better. Albertans are looking for the type of leadership that made this province great, leadership that created the Alberta success stories in our ranching and farming communities and the oil patch. They are looking for leadership in balancing the budget without compromising our front line. They are looking for leadership that looks the challenges of the global economy straight in the eye and does not blink. From what we have seen so far, we are not getting this from our newest Premier. She has flopped on her democratic reform. She has failed to set election dates. She's flopped in coming back to allow free votes here in the Legislature.

What we know is that we've seen a nine-month hiatus, where government MLAs can speak out, but now that the leadership race is over, is anything going to change? It was very sad to realize that all of those individuals over there voted for Bill 50 and said that it's a wonderful thing, yet when we had a leadership debate, they started to denounce it. Now the silence will set in again and a lack of democracy.

Mr. Speaker, probably the most concerning is: is this Premier committed to balancing the budget?

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:14 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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