



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

Issue 2

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 27th Legislature

Fifth Session

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Zwozdesky, Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)	Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
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	Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
	Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 67 Alberta Liberal: 8 Wildrose: 4 New Democrat: 2 Alberta: 1 Independent: 1

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MacDonald
Quest
Taft

Standing Committee on Community Development

Chair: Mrs. Jablonski
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Rodney
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Swann
Woo-Paw

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Life and health are precious. When they are lost, all of us are impacted. Let us remember those who are no longer among us with the most positive of thoughts, and let us reach out with compassion, understanding, and prayer to those who suffer. May blessings be upon them, and may they find eternal salvation in an eternity of peace. Amen.

Please be seated.

Hon. members, on our first day when we return, we take the time after prayers so that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away, and in respect would you all stand, please.

Mr. Brian C. Downey
November 5, 1950, to January 12, 2012

The Speaker: Mr. Brian C. Downey, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, passed away on January 12, 2012, at the age of 61 years. Mr. Downey was first elected in the election held May 8, 1986, and was re-elected on March 20, 1989. He served until April 8, 1989. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Stettler for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Brian Downey served on the select standing committees on Private Bills, Public Accounts, Public Affairs, and as chair of the Special Committee to Prepare and Report Lists of Members to Compose the Select Standing Committees. With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family, who are with us today in the Speaker's gallery, who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I'd ask each of you to remember the hon. member, Brian C. Downey, as you have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. These guests are family members of our former colleague Brian Downey. I'd ask them to rise, please, as I mention their names: Mrs. Trudy Downey, widow of Mr. Brian Downey, former MLA for the constituency of Stettler. His parents, Cliff and Frances Downey, are here with members of their family as well, including Brian's daughter, Allison Downey-Damato, with Marc Downey-Damato; Brian's son, Dustin Downey, and Jovina Downey; and grandchildren Matteo Downey-Damato, Kestrel Damato, Duke Downey, and Jasmine Downey. Please offer them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all

members of the House here some very special visitors from Velma E. Baker school in my constituency. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Peacock, and by parent helpers Mrs. Erickson, Mrs. Krysa, Mrs. Schmidt, Mr. Ruda, and Mr. Ollerhead. Velma Baker has the distinction of being absolutely one of the finest schools in all of Alberta, and these students are a testament to that outstanding education system we have. I would ask all of these members from the school and the parent helpers and teachers to please rise and receive the warm applause of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood?
The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a unique group of University of Alberta students. They are the stars of a program called Heifer in Your Tank. This program was started by Dr. Frank Robinson, professor, who wanted the animal science class to develop something more original than a term paper. The result is project-based learning. The students perform live skits based on the rural chautauquas of the past to educate the public on the science related to the production of animals and their by-products that we use every day. I saw the students in November at Farmfair and was truly impressed with these young people and their program. They truly are the future of agriculture.

With that, I would like to introduce Dr. Frank Robinson, Martin Zuidhof, Dana Penrice, Dustin Banks, Erica Posteraro, Lucas Nickel, Airell Deslauriers, Chelsea Geiger, and Jami Frederick. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly. Thank you for coming.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the second chance that you have afforded me. I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Brian Topp. Brian is one of the candidates for the federal NDP leadership, and this evening he is participating in a debate with other candidates organized by the New Democratic Youth of Alberta and the Edmonton-Strathcona federal NDP. Brian Topp is a former Montreal business owner, Credit Union director, and a board member of ROI venture capital fund. He has also served as staff to former NDP leader Ed Broadbent and former Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow. I appreciate all of the candidates for the visits that they have paid to Alberta. I now ask Brian to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: We'll just move on to Edmonton-Decore, please.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 13 guests seated in the members' gallery here in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the Catholic Women's League, Edmonton diocese. I would ask them to please rise as I say their names: Gladys Brown, Edmonton diocesan Catholic Women's League president for the archdiocese of Edmonton; Gwen Elliott, Catholic Women's League president-elect for the archdiocese of Edmonton; June Fuller, past president of the Edmonton diocesan Catholic Women's League; Mable Solomon, past president of the Edmonton diocesan Catholic Women's League; Ardis Beaudry, honorary life member of the Catholic Women's League, diocesan provincial and national president of Canada. Life members of the CWL and chairpersons of the upcoming national convention of the

Catholic Women's League, scheduled to be held in Edmonton in August, include Connie McBride and Mary-Lou Veeken.

Mr. Speaker, remarkable information collected regarding the preservation and distribution of a hundred years of commemoration of the Catholic Women's League, Edmonton diocese, its faith and service, also includes Rose-Marie McCarthy, Mary-Anne Warren, and Natalie Carley. Also, we have Cecile Shaul, a member of Catholic Women's League, St. Charles; Vera Huber, a member of Catholic Women's League, St. Charles; and Mary Hunt, council officer for the Catholic Women's League, Edmonton diocese.

I would ask all those here today to give them the traditional warm welcome. Thank you.

1:40

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday evening a very successful Queen's Diamond Jubilee dinner was held with over 315 guests in attendance. Twenty-four hon. members participated in that event, including yourself, Mr. Speaker. The Deputy Premier, the Official Opposition House Leader, and I were joined by representatives from the judiciary, the military, the business community, and the public at large. The dinner committee presented a cheque for over \$10,000 to Valour Place, a privately funded, assisted living residence for the bereaved families of fallen members of the Canadian Forces, wounded and injured soldiers, members of the RCMP and their families who are undergoing rehabilitation in Edmonton, a well-recognized regional centre of excellence for rehab medicine in Canada.

In the Speaker's gallery is Captain Robert Clarke, chairman of the Diamond Jubilee dinner. I would thank Captain Clarke for his leadership and for the work of his committee and invite him to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you the love of my life and my better half, Sharon MacLean, seated in the Speaker's gallery. I'd like to ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have one other introduction. It's a young fellow who at the age of 13 volunteered on Grant Mitchell's campaign. He also ran federally in Red Deer and finished very close in the mayor's race in Edmonton recently. He is now my constituency assistant, Andrew Lineker. I'd like Andrew to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce three people to you and through you to this honourable Assembly. The first is Mr. Peter Rilstone. Peter has been a teacher for the Calgary board of education for the last 40 years. He is now retired. He's helping me out door-knocking in Calgary-Buffalo and has been a tremendous amount of support both to me personally and to my family over the course of the last 30 years.

I'd also like to introduce to you my mother, Judy Hehr. Having two children who are lawyers who are sometimes argumentative, she still provides us with advice, love, and nurturing on an unconditional basis. I love you very much, Mum.

The last introduction is my father, and I will share with you that my father and I, growing up, would watch Stampede Wrestling. Even as I got older, we'd watch WWF, and maybe that's why I've

chosen this profession, Mr. Speaker. Bret Hart would say before his wrestling matches that he was the best there was, the best there is, the best there ever will be, and that saying can apply to my father.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three guests from the New Democratic Youth of Alberta, part of the growing wave of young people joining our party. Sean Weatherall and Jenna Hienemann are two students who recently started a new NDP club at MacEwan University. Bradley LaFortune is joining them. He studies at U of A and is helping organize tonight's federal NDP leadership debate. I'd now like to ask all three of my guests to stand as I call their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of the assembly: Bradley LaFortune, Sean Weatherall, and Jenna Hienemann. Welcome.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you for that third opportunity that you've afforded me, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a group of very bright young students from Delton elementary school. They are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Dao Haddad and Miss Michelle Auger, who is their educational assistant. Delton elementary school is participating in the School at the Legislature program this week, and I'm looking forward to speaking with them tomorrow. Thank you very much. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly someone that's going to be very important in my life for the next couple of months, and that's my campaign manager, Kirsten Sztain. Kirsten has a master's degree in political science and worked in my office for a couple of years, at which time she then left to work on a civic campaign in Calgary in which she brought her candidate to within 3 per cent of defeating an incumbent city councillor, so I do know I'm in very good hands. I'd ask Kirsten to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a couple of anniversaries to acknowledge. Yesterday, February 7, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, reached another milestone in his life and today the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. Happy birthday to you, sir, as well.

Members' Statements

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

Catholic Women's League, Edmonton Diocese Centennial

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and privilege to rise today in recognition of the Catholic Women's League, Edmonton diocese, for 100 years of faith and service. While the league was formally incorporated in Montreal in 1920, Edmonton is the birthplace of the Catholic Women's League in Canada. The Catholic Women's League is now a national organization with a proud and extensive history and which is

comprised of many councils throughout Canada, including the Edmonton diocese.

History notes that during the 1900s while travelling throughout the United Kingdom, Edmontonian Katherine Hughes became acquainted with their recently organized Catholic women's leagues. Upon her return the league concept went forward with Bishop Émile Legal, Oblate of Mary Immaculate, OMI, of Edmonton.

In 1912 the women who founded the Catholic Women's League began with a mission to protect and support immigrant women and girls seeking work in Edmonton and to promote spiritual and temporal good works. Mr. Speaker, the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi states: for it is in giving of ourselves that we receive. Truly this simple statement personifies the Catholic Women's League, Edmonton diocese.

Throughout the hundred years the outreach activities of the Catholic Women's League, Edmonton diocese, included in the early days establishing a hostel for girls, visiting hospitals, and providing employment services. Today their focus includes charitable involvement with Catholic Social Services and an initiative called Back Porch, which provides resources and information on unplanned pregnancies. Indeed, these are the living examples of the Alberta spirit.

Mr. Speaker, more than 10,000 Catholic women belong to the Catholic Women's League in Alberta and the Northwest Territories. I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation and admiration to all the women of the past, present, and future of the Catholic Women's League, Edmonton diocese, for adding immeasurably to the creation of healthy, caring communities within our great city, province, country, and throughout the world. The longevity of the Catholic Women's League, Edmonton diocese, is truly a testament to a membership that inspires faith, hope, and humanitarian contributions within our communities. *My sincere congratulations and best wishes, and God bless the continued great success of the Catholic Women's League, Edmonton diocese.**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Before we proceed, hon. members, as chair I would like to make a brief statement about the rotation of oral questions and members' statements. As has been the situation often during the life of this Legislature, there was a further realignment to the caucus memberships over the period of adjournment, with the result being that there is one independent member since the Assembly last met.

The current situation with one independent member and one member of the Alberta caucus is identical to the situation that existed when the Assembly convened on February 22, 2011, nearly one year ago. The rotation of oral questions was distributed with my letter to you dated January 27, 2012, concerning the Fifth Session of the 27th Legislature. Attachments 3 and 4 to the Speaker's procedural letter outline the Oral Question Period rotation and the projected sitting days calendar, which includes the rotation for Members' Statements. These schedules again mirror the rotations for both items of business that were in place one year ago.

Accordingly, the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster is entitled to a question once every four days. As was the previous independent member, he will be entitled to the sixth question on day 3. Today is day 1 on the sitting calendar, so the independent member will be

able to ask a question next Monday, February 13, 2012. He'll be entitled to present a member's statement once every two weeks. His first opportunity will be next Wednesday, February 15.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Budget

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to congratulate the Premier for recognizing in the Speech from the Throne the value of what Alberta Liberals have been saying for many years: the Alberta government has both a revenue problem and a spending problem. Will the Premier take the next bold step and implement a fair tax formula so that we don't have to sell off pieces of the family farm to pay the bills?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am certainly looking forward to the Minister of Finance presenting the budget tomorrow. The throne speech was a hallmark in terms of saying that we as Albertans, all Albertans, need to be talking about what our fiscal framework is. We believe it's very important to make sure that Albertans are getting valuable services for the money that's spent, and we're looking forward to continuing that debate after tomorrow.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, personal and corporate income taxes don't even cover what this government spends on health care, so will the Premier be honest and tell us how the government plans to raise enough revenue to pay the rest of the bills?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I'm looking forward to the Minister of Finance's speech and the presentation of the budget tomorrow. You know, we have the tremendous privilege in this province of being the governing party that has been able to balance those issues very effectively, and we'll continue to do so.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, if there was any balancing happening, we wouldn't be firing nurses and teachers.

Given that the Speech from the Throne suggests the Premier will yet again review problems without solving them, when will the Premier have the courage to do something about it instead of just talking about it?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, every day since the 1st of October this government has stood up in this House. We have solved problems. We have identified problems. We have acted where we've needed to with respect to budgeting. We've acted where we've needed to with respect to legislation. We've acted where we've needed to with respect to making decisions in government that favourably impact Albertans, and we'll continue to do that.

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

Electricity Prices

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Speech from the Throne included no plan to address one of this government's most obvious policy failures, electricity deregulation, which has led to higher power bills across the board. Why hasn't this Premier done anything to give consumers relief from skyrocketing power bills?

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, what the Speech from the Throne did yesterday was refer to the fact that we have tremendous opportunities for economic development, that we have very important natural resources that have to be managed for the benefit of Albertans. As we move through doing what government needs to do with respect to legislation and policy development, we will do what this caucus and cabinet cares about. That is ensuring that Alberta is competitive. It's ensuring that Alberta consumers are paying rates that are competitive and fair and ensuring that industry is going to be able to afford to keep operating.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what they will ensure. They will ensure that on the coldest day in the winter a shortage of electricity shot it up to over 90 cents a kilowatt hour. Ninety cents. Will the Premier admit that the assurance of lower prices from deregulation is yet another one of this government's broken promises to the people?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the fact that electricity prices have been higher in December and January. It's due to the unfortunate outage of three different power plants. I'm happy to report that one of them is back online now and that the regulated rate option for next month is predicted to be lower than it is this month.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, given that the recent TransAlta example proves there is enormous profit to be made by breaking price gouging laws, will the Premier make sure that the fines for law-breaking are actually higher than the profits from cheating?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the incident with TransAlta prior to Christmas shows that the system does work. The irregularities were spotted at the very hours that they happened. They were reprimanded.

I'm happy to report to the House and to Albertans that the price for electricity in this province for the last five years has averaged 8 cents a kilowatt hour. It's totally competitive.

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

PC Caucus Meeting in Jasper

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November the Premier said:

I believe it's important for political parties to pay for partisan activity that their leader undertakes . . . I think it's critical that if there are expenses related to pure political activity that they not be paid for by either the government of Alberta or the [people] of Alberta, and we're completely above board about that.

Will the Premier please explain how the PC caucus and many unelected Tory candidates going to a retreat immediately prior to an election can be considered anything other than a taxpayer-subsidized political activity?

Ms Redford: Everyone who sits in this House who ran for the Progressive Conservative Party is sitting as a member of the government caucus. There are many people in the opposition, who are members of other caucuses, who also receive caucus budgets, Mr. Speaker. We know that we follow the rules with respect to how we spend that money, and I presume that all hon. members on the other side do exactly the same thing. We had a very successful caucus. There is certainly no doubt that everyone in Alberta knew that we were having a caucus, and we got some good results.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it must have been nice to load up the luxury bus to go for a nice little retreat.

Given the Premier's insistence that the government will be more accountable and transparent than it has been in the past, will the Premier make all the receipts associated with the Jasper junket/retreat publicly available?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, there is a system in place in this House that ensures that all spending is accounted for, that rules are followed, and of course we will follow those rules.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, rest assured that this team will stretch those rules as far as they can.

Given that also in November the Premier said that she believes it's critical to be transparent about this kind of spending, what proof will the Premier give Albertans that shows her caucus didn't bend the rules by using taxpayer money for electioneering?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the LAO, as I understand it, is the office that ensures that caucuses spend their money appropriately. We have a whip that I trust to do that. We have an LAO that I presume has systems in place that audit that. We are incredibly confident that there was absolutely nothing untoward, and there's no reason to suggest otherwise.

Provincial Tax Policy

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta income tax advantage of a 10 per cent flat tax is something that most Albertans are proud of. It's a tax that doesn't punish success, treats everyone equally, and makes our province attractive for highly skilled workers. In yesterday's throne speech it was noted that this government plans on reviewing income taxes, which likely means raising them. To the Premier. As you know, should Albertans choose a Wildrose government in the coming weeks, we will not raise income taxes. Will you clearly commit to Albertans that should a PC government be re-elected, you will not increase income taxes?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the throne speech yesterday set out a very important discussion that we need to have as Albertans. We need to talk about how we spend, and we have to talk about revenue. We have to talk about the heritage fund, and we're going to do all of that. I'll tell you that I'm looking forward to, as I said before, the budget tomorrow. The other thing is that I'm looking forward to this House passing this budget so that when we go to the polls, Albertans know exactly what this government stands for.

Mr. Anderson: I'm really trying to help you out here, Premier. Given your refusal to commit to not raising income taxes should you be re-elected, will you at the very least commit to Albertans that you will under absolutely no circumstances increase income taxes or implement any other kind of tax increase without disclosing your plans to do so before Albertans go to the polls on election day?

2:00

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, there is a budget coming to this House tomorrow that is going to set a very clear fiscal plan for the future of this province. I think that's what Albertans want, that's what they expect, and that's what they're going to see. There will be no doubt with respect to that.

Mr. Anderson: Well, that was as clear as mud.

Premier, given that your Finance minister has openly mused about a provincial sales tax and bringing back a health tax and now you are floating the idea of an increased income tax, will you

prove wrong all those who are out there saying that you are the most liberal tax-and-spend Premier in the history of this province and make it clear to Albertans that under no circumstances will you increase their taxes or that if you do increase their taxes, you will at least tell us which taxes you plan to increase and by how much before – that being the key word – Albertans go to the polls? How much are you going to raise taxes, Premier? How much?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in the budget to be brought to this House tomorrow, that will be passed before we go to the polls, it will be very clear to Albertans what this government stands for.

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

Electricity Prices

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On the weekend my wife and I looked at our electricity bill. My wife dug out the power bill from a year ago, and we compared them. We compared the bills, and she was shocked to see that, in fact, our power bill is double what it was a year ago. I want to ask the Premier: why is she prepared to let ordinary Alberta families remain at the tender mercies of the big power companies, who are reaping huge profits, and force people to pay double what they were paying a year ago for their power bill?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I've already indicated to the House that the system we have has provided competitive electricity rates with all nonhydro jurisdictions. For the last five years it has averaged 8 cents a kilowatt hour. Albertans should know that if they don't like the regulated rate option, almost all customers have the option of a contract which will lock them in at a rate. Right now those contracts are running 8 to 9 cents per kilowatt hour. You can get them for three to five years.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, my neighbours and the people in my constituency and, in fact, all over Alberta are calling and e-mailing me about their power rates. Whatever the minister has said, the power rates are just way too high. I want to ask the Premier: why is she not going to take action to protect ordinary Alberta families from these outrageous power bills?

Ms Redford: What we know is that, as the Minister of Energy has said, with a deregulated market we are able to provide some of the lowest cost electricity in the country, Mr. Speaker. Over the long term that's very important. Sometimes with respect to markets we do see increases; we also see decreases. When we comparatively look over time, what we see is Alberta consumers having very competitive prices with respect to electricity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Just last week I was visiting some of my seniors in my constituency, and they raised the question of the power bills that they have to pay on fixed incomes. Power rates go up and down like crazy, and they're wondering, you know, what the government is going to do to protect them from these rising prices, that they just can't afford to pay. Why doesn't the Premier have an answer for them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege of serving in a department called Human Services. I was asked to do so by the Premier because this Premier focuses very much on vulnerable Albertans and how we support them. If there are any vulnerable Albertans who are in distress because they cannot afford to meet their bills, Alberta Works and Alberta Supports will be there to help them.

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

Poverty Reduction

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the groups Vibrant Communities Calgary and Action to End Poverty in Alberta released *The Costs of Poverty*, an externally reviewed study that shows that keeping people in poverty costs Alberta between \$7.1 billion and \$9.5 billion a year. If poverty were a government ministry, only health would consume more of the provincial budget. Will the Premier commit today to do the right thing and the fiscally responsible thing and invest in a poverty reduction strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report on Monday was very interesting. I think it gathered a lot of information that many of us who've been active on these issues have known for many years. We know that it's the right thing to do not only because it has an economic interest for us but also because we want to make sure we're supporting vulnerable Albertans. That's why we created the Ministry of Human Services, so that we had the ability under a very strong minister to bring services together to develop policy and to create a social policy framework.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Since the approach to poverty that she inherited, a system of benefits and services for the poor which it sounds as though she wants to continue, actually keeps people poor rather than giving them a hand up, will she follow the recommendation of the former Standing Committee on the Economy and ask people who've had the experience of living poor what they need to get themselves out of the poverty trap?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we're on precisely that trail with our social policy framework discussions. Over the past two months I've been meeting with people who deal with social agencies across the province as well as people engaged in business. We're also going to be talking with people who are actually in poverty and people who are the recipients of social agencies as we move forward to develop a social policy framework which deals with both how you help people in need and how you prevent the situation where people get to need. [interjection]

The Speaker: The hon. member, please. We'll get to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre in question 17.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. I keep hearing about this social policy framework, and I'm hoping that all you're doing is hanging a different name on a poverty reduction strategy because maybe you think it'll sell better that way. Given that Calgary reported its first homeless population decrease in 20 years this week, will the Premier acknowledge that the 10-year plan to end homelessness is working and, since housing is part, as is electricity deregulation, of the poverty

picture, make the same commitment to poverty reduction that her government has admirably made to ending homelessness?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the 10-year action plan to end homelessness is working across this province, and it is a model. It's a model of how social agencies can work with government and community to create the opportunity for individual Albertans to be successful, and it's working. Unfortunately, it's probably the poverty reduction strategy that should be renamed because it is broader than just poverty reduction. It's about how people balance that income gap and those other things which affect social cohesion and how government and community work together to help people stay out of poverty as well as to get the tools they need to support themselves and their families and to be contributing citizens.

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

Ambulance Services

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. We're almost three years into the transition of ambulance service from the municipalities to the province, yet I in Strathcona and the Member for Sherwood Park, I know, and many of my colleagues here continue to hear about problems with response times, consolidation, and dispatch. Can the minister please tell us when these problems will be solved and Albertans will see a more seamless ambulance service?

Mr. Horne: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. I think it's important to note that we have seen improvement over the last three years in Alberta. In the case of Edmonton, for example, I had the opportunity to go on a ride-along with EMS staff here a couple of weeks ago, and I was pleased to see some of the advances that have been made in dispatch, the opportunities for EMS staff to hand off patients to other crews to reduce their waiting time and allow them to get back on the road. That said, there are many challenges, Mr. Speaker. I think the first improvement in the discussion about this issue will be with better data.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental to the same minister. We've heard about lots of challenges, especially here in the capital region. Can the minister tell us what he personally has done to ensure that the people of Edmonton continue to receive a higher quality ambulance service as this transition continues?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, a number of things have been done already. In the case of Edmonton we know that additional stations are needed, and plans are in place to open an additional five stations over the next few years. In addition to that, we need to ensure that we have adequate numbers of staff on the road.

All the while I think it's important that we recognize that the volume of visits in our emergency departments is increasing. In the last six months alone the volume of ED visits in Edmonton is up as much as 20 per cent. So while we continue to make improvements in resources that are allocated to EMS workers, we also have to continue our work to reduce waiting times in the emergency department.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Quest: No supplemental.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:10 PC Party Benefit Plan Trust

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. In Alberta donations to political parties are eligible for a tax credit of up to 75 per cent, a benefit that costs the Treasury as much as \$5 million each year. My first question is to the Premier. Do donations to the PC Party fund the Premier's salary top-up, also known as the benefit plan trust? Those donations are eligible for at least a partial tax credit.

The Speaker: Well, we're on the edge here, but if you wish to proceed, proceed.

Okay. Second question, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the Premier: why is it necessary to top up your \$215,000 annual salary with a benefit plan trust that is subsidized by the taxpayers of this province? Is your power bill that high?

Ms Redford: I vividly recall this discussion from last session, and I very clearly said at that time that this trust that this hon. member is referring to is not a trust that I have any knowledge of. It is not possible for me to answer questions about it. It is not something that touches my life in any way. I have no answer to the question because it is not connected to me as either Premier of the province or Leader of the PC Party, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: given that the former Premier, the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, had a benefit plan trust set up for him from the PC Party, are you telling this House and taxpayers across the province that you are not to receive a benefit plan trust as the former Premier did?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I will say, as I said two minutes ago and as I said all of last fall, that I do not receive a salary top-up. I do not receive anything remotely related to anything that the hon. member is referring to. Whatever may have come before with respect to those arrangements has nothing to do with me.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Impaired Driving

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transportation regarding the impaired driving legislation. Certainly there is support for it in my constituency, and they have certainly gotten the message about drinking and driving. No one wants to get hit or killed by a drunk driver. At the same time I'm getting lots of questions about how it will work, when it's coming forward, how it will be implemented, and whether it's okay to have a drink with dinner. Can the minister offer some clarification to these questions?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, try one.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this legislation is about making our roads safer for all Albertans. Let me clarify that this does not change the limits and what it means to be impaired. This also does

not prevent an individual from having a drink or going out after work with friends or with family. The only thing that's been changed . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the minister can continue that.

Also, which part of the legislation is going to go first? You're obviously targeting criminal offenders and repeat offenders the most. So which part of the legislation will be implemented first?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I've always tried to make it clear that this legislation will be implemented in phases. What we hope will happen and what we're working towards is to ensure that the .08 and above is dealt with or implemented probably at the beginning of summer. Also, the .05 would be implemented at the end of summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why will the penalties for the .05 to .08 take longer to implement?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure with what we're doing that we do it right, that we get the tracking system in place. More critically important, we need to ensure that there is a public education portion, and presently we are working with the hospitality and restaurant industry. At the end of the day this is to ensure that our highways are safer, and we are working with industry and with people in Alberta to make sure that this does happen.

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

Accommodation and Health Care for Seniors

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certain phrases from the Speech from the Throne yesterday were very disconcerting for many Albertans, including myself, concerned about the future of health care in Alberta. The Premier has already indicated that she intends to encourage further privatization of long-term care and lift the cap on accommodation fees, which makes long-term care unaffordable for many Albertans. To the Premier: why would you choose higher costs for seniors' care?

Ms Redford: The hon. member's suggestion that this is the new order of the day is simply not the case. What we have is the opportunity right now to create institutions that will be more than places for people to be housed. We are going to create homes for people who are going to be able to have a quality of life through the entire time that they choose to be in some form of continuing care and assisted living. There will be a number of options available for seniors – and that's important – but no one will be left behind, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Swann: If they can afford – if they can afford – the new levels of care.

Is the Premier aware that study after study has shown that the introduction of private, for-profit health care leads to not only increased costs but reduced quality of care?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the suggestion in the hon. member's question that health care would be privatized in any way is absolutely false. We have a system in Alberta where we have

accommodation and we have health care that are combined and delivered in one facility. We will do very creative work that will matter to Albertans with respect to accommodation. No Alberta senior ever has to be worried that their health care will be impacted.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier assiduously avoids saying that this will be publicly funded and publicly delivered. By so doing, it's clear the agenda is private alternatives.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member's conclusion is not connected to his supposition. The fact that we are going to have an accommodation system that will allow Alberta seniors choice while still taking care of all seniors is what Alberta seniors have said that they want. We in this government have guaranteed that publicly funded health care will be available for all Albertans, including seniors.

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

Athabasca Oil Sands Area Transportation Coordinating Committee

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the government signed an agreement with the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo committing to a number of initiatives intended to improve planning and co-ordination in the Fort McMurray oil sands region. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure, responsible for the oil sands secretariat. What tangible progress has been made in implementing this agreement? [interjection]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question. The MOU is a very important agreement with both the government of Alberta and the Fort McMurray community, and we all know the pressures that they're dealing with up there. To better co-ordinate and do forward planning, there were two main commitments in this MOU. One was to establish the transportation co-ordinating committee; the other was to establish an urban development subregion. Both of these would empower the community and industry to do better forward planning, and we've made some good progress on those.

Mrs. Leskiw: My second question is to the same minister. Who is on this new committee, and what is its mandate?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the transportation co-ordinating committee, which was announced in January by both the Minister of Transportation and myself and reports to both the Minister of Transportation and myself, includes representatives from the Oil Sands Developers Group, the municipality, the Alberta Economic Development Authority, the Fort McMurray Airport Authority, the Northern Alberta Development Council. Really, it's a formal mechanism for these groups to come forward and do forward planning, help with high-level priorities and potentially alternative funding ideas on the transportation needs of the region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Transportation. How does the work of this committee tie in with the work done by Alberta Transportation?

2:20

Mr. Danyluk: Well, what happens, Mr. Speaker, is – I find it very interesting that the member opposite that represents the area talks about it being run by bureaucrats. In fact, the situation is exactly the opposite. I look forward to the advice that is coming from the committee that involves industry, that involves municipalities, that involves people of Fort McMurray to help decide what the transportation priorities should be. It is critical that we work with the community and not charge ahead with a plan that has no focus or direction.

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

PC Caucus Meeting and Cabinet Tour

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are about how this government defines results-based budgeting when it comes to Bill 1. Albertans have a few ideas about what getting results for their tax dollar means. It means prioritizing spending on front-line services, supporting our health professionals who hold our health system together, and, most importantly, balancing the books. It definitely doesn't include spending \$70,000 on a government getaway to the Jasper Park Lodge. Can the Treasury Board president then explain to Albertans how their two-day government getaway at the slopes is a priority for Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Well, as the Premier said, each of the caucuses in this Legislature is allotted an amount of money to be used for their caucus meetings, their caucus retreats, their expenses as a caucus. In fact, some of the caucuses even pay members that are outside of their particular sphere of influence, in some cases some leaders and whatnot. These caucus funds are all monitored by the Legislative Assembly. Under your auspices, Mr. Speaker, we have a set of rules that we must all follow, and this government caucus did follow those rules.

Mrs. Forsyth: Sir, you didn't answer the question. We're talking about priorities for Albertans.

Given that this government spent over a hundred thousand dollars of hard-earned tax dollars of Alberta families on a pre-election cabinet tour as the budget was already at the printing presses, can the Treasury Board president let Albertans know if that's what they call getting results for Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I recall being on several cabinet tours. In fact, the only reason I missed the last cabinet tour was that I stepped down from cabinet to run for the leadership of our party. I can tell you that the tour last February was very well received by Albertans because they want us to be out there with them, not stuck in here all the time. They want us to be in their community, to be talking to them directly every year. We will continue to do that.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Treasury Board President, that's your job as an MLA.

How can you, Mr. Treasury Board President, even rationalize spending over \$170,000 in the last month, and how can you even consider that a priority for Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have told us that their priority is for us to listen to them. That means getting into their communities and talking to them, and that's exactly what we did. We will continue to do that. The next election is four years away.

We're not going to stop talking to them. The next election is four months away. We're not going to stop talking to them. We're going to continue.

Aboriginal Education

Mr. Hehr: Over half the inmates in our prisons are aboriginal. Yesterday's throne speech said that this government will try to create educational opportunities for our First Nations communities, but the federal government, which funds First Nations education 30 per cent below the rest of society, has decided to build prisons instead of schools and handed us the bill. To the minister of aboriginal relations. It has become clear that this government will not stand up for Alberta when the feds are passing along costs for their insanity. Accordingly, I'll ask the minister to get a backbone and refuse to pay the bill for more prisons and demand that these millions be put into keeping people out of jail . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister, please.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, this is a very inaccurate and unfair portrayal of what the federal government has done and is doing. As a matter of fact, I have to report to the Legislature that some three months ago I met with Minister Duncan, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. We have decided to approach aboriginal education in Alberta together as partners, whether it's on- or off-reserve, to share our expertise both in delivering education and in federal government aboriginal relations, and to look at children as children irrespective of whether they live on- or off-reserve.

Mr. Hehr: I appreciate the minister's enthusiasm for answering that question, but it was meant for the minister in charge of aboriginal relations when I asked him whether we're going to pay for this insane prison program the federal government is running, or are we going to pay to put some schools on native reserves?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member raising the issue of education. It allows us an opportunity to talk about the initiatives that are under way with the MOU, the discussions that we're having with aboriginal leaders, aboriginal communities, the federal government, and certainly our ministries to advance very important issues around aboriginal education, critical issues to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Hehr: So a follow-up question to the same minister: are we simply going to pay the bill, then, for these prisons? Are we not going to say anything to the federal government about this?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, the issue of paying bills is not relevant to the initiatives that we have in that we're working very closely with aboriginal peoples from around the province on to advance educational issues, recognizing this is an important pathway to achieving economic and social success for aboriginal communities throughout Alberta.

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

Homelessness in Calgary

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some research has identified Calgary as the centre of homelessness in Alberta due to the attractive job market but lack of affordable housing. A recent report on the state of homelessness in Calgary which says that the

number of people living on the streets in Calgary is down 11.4 per cent is certainly very, very good news. To the Minister of Human Services: how do you plan to ensure that this number continues to decrease and keep the momentum in this positive direction?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the preliminary count results that came out this week in Calgary are very, very encouraging. By the straight numbers that's 411 fewer people on the street than the previous count, and we know that that's about 4,500 people across this province who now have places to live and the opportunity to live in dignity, access to the programs that they need to be successful. We're going to continue that good work with the community agencies and the municipalities across this province. The action on homelessness is working.

Ms Woo-Paw: Can the minister comment on the accuracy of this number in response to the recent criticism that this year's count took place on a frigid January evening rather than in May?

Mr. Hancock: Well, no, Mr. Speaker, I can't comment on the methodology that was used, but I can say this. On that frigid day that the count was done, approximately 98 per cent of the homeless were in some form of shelter. That was good news, that the people who were homeless were being appropriately taken care of so that they weren't out in that bitter weather. I do know that the Homeless Foundation is also planning to do a summer count.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

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

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's speech from the throne paid lip service to finding "new and effective ways to reach out to vulnerable Albertans." Meanwhile, a promise the Premier made during the Progressive Conservative leadership race last summer remains unfulfilled. To the Minister of Seniors. The Premier promised to increase assured income for the severely handicapped benefits by \$400 a month and to double the amount recipients can earn before the government claws back their payments. AISH recipients want to know: when will the Premier's promise becoming a reality?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you for that question. Mr. Speaker, the most vulnerable Albertans do receive great services today, and I expect in the near future we'll hear lots of news about receiving even better service.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the Seniors minister: given the high cost of living in this province, will this government consider indexing AISH payments to the cost of accommodation and food?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is right. There are vulnerable Albertans in many situations that are very, very difficult. Today's \$1,188 top-up is not enough, and we have to do something. I've heard very, very clearly from the Premier and from my caucus to get to work on this issue. Wait till tomorrow, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given that AISH benefits were last increased in April of 2009, why has this government kept Alberta's most vulnerable waiting so long?

2:30

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, 45,000 AISH recipients, all different types of needs: disabilities, mental issues, sometimes both. We have great services to help those individuals, and those services will be enhanced. Listen to the budget very, very carefully, and let's have a discussion next week about this.

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

Advocacy for Seniors

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The number of seniors in our province is growing every day, and in the next 10 years it's projected that that number will increase by 55 per cent to over 650,000 seniors. Their needs and expectations are changing just as rapidly, and they will need help with concerns and problems they will face as they age. My question is to the hon. Minister of Seniors. When are you going to put a seniors' advocate in place?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you for that question. This is one of the issues that became very clear and near to me. As past chair of the Seniors Advisory Council I heard these concerns, and I heard these concerns reinforced by the Premier. I can tell you that together with my ministry staff this is one of the goals that I will be working on. In one year from now I commit: we'll have a seniors' advocate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I am so pleased to hear this answer and the good news about the future.

Can the minister tell me what he and his ministry are doing right now to help seniors with their immediate concerns?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you for that question again. Mr. Speaker, it's not news to any of us that seniors' issues and the seniors' population are rapidly growing in this province. I know that with my own parents going through issues at the end of their lives, it took a lot of support from families and communities and from, you know, groups like the Seniors Advisory Council, our Alberta Supports line. We get a thousand seniors a day calling our Supports line, sir. Just imagine: a thousand calls a day. It makes logical sense that the Seniors ministry work with other ministers to establish a seniors' advocate.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Environmental Protection

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's throne speech said, "The people of this province share a deep love and respect for its environment and natural resources," but clearly this government does not. Not once does the term or even the idea of environmental protection get mentioned. What we do see is the environment being dug up, clear-cut, and sold off. To the Minister of Environment and Water: how can this government claim that it

will protect the environment when every single reference in the document, in the throne speech, talks specifically about how to develop it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I would politely disagree with the hon. member. I think the actions speak louder than words with regard to the actions our Premier has taken and that we have taken with regard to environmental protection. I speak to last Friday's announcement, where I stood hand by hand and side by side with Minister Kent with regard to environmental management and how we're going to make sure that we increase the monitoring with regard to the oil sands. That's just one example of the many things that we're doing to ensure that we have a balance in this province with strong . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. But I am talking about action. I'm not talking about press releases. I'm not talking about reviews. I'm not talking about possible plans. I'm not talking about vague budgeting. I'm talking about environmental protection. When are we actually going to see it, not a bunch of plans and weird budgets and vague comments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that we had quite a bit of very positive response to that announcement because it is action driven. It is about taking action on the ground right away to make sure that there will be doubling of monitoring stations in the oil sands area, for one example. The feedback we got from scientists, from industry, from academics was that this was a great announcement, this timely announcement, and let's get on with it. That's exactly what we're doing. We're showing action in environmental protection.

Ms Blakeman: Well, then, back to the same minister: why does this government, this minister persist in the fantasy that anything they do is world leading or world class or even action based when they were dragged kicking and screaming, their little feet pounding on the ground, all the way to the monitoring table by the federal government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just allude to a conversation with Dr. Schindler with regard to the way we are moving forward so that we would have action here. The first step we did when we announced it was to make sure that we wouldn't lose this spring season. We know how important the monitoring on this spring season is. We had a great conversation with Dr. Schindler and others, and they agree with that. Let's move on with the monitoring this spring. Then let's move on to the next steps of external bodies to govern this. We are taking action today, and we took action on Friday.

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

Wills and Succession Legislation

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very important for Albertans to have a well-prepared estate plan, including a will, to

make sure their wishes are carried out after their death. To the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. I understand new legislation has been proclaimed that changes the rules for certain estate plans. Could the minister please explain what impact this new legislation has on wills and estates in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. He will recall that this important legislation was actually passed over a year ago, in the fall of 2010, but it was just proclaimed February 1. This legislation modernizes wills and estate law that had not previously been updated going back as far as the 1920s. There are changes. I can't possibly go through all of the changes that would impact Albertans, but there are some changes. Some may affect some Albertans; others may not. My best advice to all Albertans is to talk to their advisers and make a will.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents have concerns that their current estate plans will be affected by a rule that would allow a surviving spouse who takes their matrimonial property from his or her spouse's estate to also inherit from the estate. Could the minister please explain the intentions of this rule?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, there were many consultations that happened both before the legislation was passed in the fall of 2010 and since. One of the reasons for giving a year before implementing the legislation was so that people in the industry, if I can call it that, could speak to their clients, speak amongst each other, and identify any issues. There was an issue, but there is a very important principle that has been developed in the consultation, which was that the spouse of a deceased should be no worse off when their spouse dies than if they were divorced. We are having another look at that issue.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you for that explanation.

Given that this inheritance issue can affect the estate plans of some Albertans, could the minister tell us what he is doing to resolve this issue?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I was aware and am aware of the concerns that had been expressed, particularly with respect to the transition. When we proclaimed the legislation as of February 1, we specifically did not proclaim the part that dealt with the amendment to the Matrimonial Property Act. I have asked my department to engage in further discussions with experts in the area, people who are the front-line practitioners, so that we can reach an agreement as to how best to implement the new legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Skilled Labour Shortage

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During my meetings with many business owners in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie excellent feedback was received regarding what we're doing well and what we need to work on. One of the major concerns that was expressed to me had to do with the labour shortage that Alberta will be facing in the near future. My questions are to the Minister of Human Services. Given that

Alberta's population is continuing to age at an increasing rate, what is the government doing to help attract and retain quality, skilled workers to our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a concern. I mean, we have the benefit, as we look around the world and see what's happening in many other places and the unemployment circumstances there, that we have an economy that's growing. Indeed, it's a great problem to have. We do need more people. We need more people because we have 19,000 people every year retiring as the baby boomers get older. I wasn't anticipating that you would be one of those, Mr. Speaker. I anticipate that you will go on to long, more enjoyable practices for the good of Albertans.

But we need people, so we need to engage aboriginal people, mature workers, women in nontraditional occupations, persons with disabilities, youth, and we need programs . . .

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Attracting these workers to our province is one thing, but a number of my constituents have expressed concerns that a number of these workers are coming to our province and then leaving soon after. What additional programs are in place to make sure they reside in Alberta and become permanent residents here?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two aspects to that. One is that we do need to work with social agencies in our communities to help immigrant workers particularly, people coming from other parts of the world who perhaps need help with English as a second language, so that they can have the language of work but also so that they can settle into the community, have access to the schools, and be comfortable in the community. We need to work with them on those issues. We also, of course, have temporary foreign workers, and we need to make sure that those temporary foreign workers also fit well into the world of work and the communities in which they live.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: No more questions.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question-and-answer period for today. Nineteen members were recognized; 106 questions and responses were given. We're moving along quite well, so we'll take a 30-second break before we continue the Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Provincial Fiscal Policy

Mr. Hehr: What has been lost in the conversation regarding the Alberta Liberal platform is that we will probably balance the budget. Let's think about this for a second, not think about left or right but simply what is best for today and for tomorrow.

Unless you're totally going to dismiss the role of government, there are expenditures that need to take place: roads, schools, universities, police, ambulance, hospitals, long-term care facilities, and the hiring of people to work in these endeavours. Money to pay for these services comes from income tax, fossil fuel, and

gambling revenues. Currently these essential services cost some \$40 billion a year: \$12 billion from taxes, \$2 billion from gambling, \$10 billion or so from fossil fuels, and the rest are user fees and federal transfers and for the last four years by using the sustainability fund, which is now all but used. Take away resource revenues, gambling, and now the sustainability fund; it is clear we have a structural deficit.

Since 1985 the Alberta government has spent over \$200 billion in fossil fuel revenues. Despite this largesse at different times Alberta has faced cycles of cuts to services and spending of epic proportions. See Ralph bucks. Furthermore, we have not saved a dime in our heritage trust fund, a fund that was set up to recognize that using all of our fossil fuel revenues to pay today's bills would be like a landowner selling off pieces of the family farm to go on vacation.

In our plan we show a way to provide essential services and a way of saving for the future, all this without increasing the taxes of 90 per cent of Albertans. This is a responsible position. Even if you believe in a tax advantage, there's no need for a tax holiday. We will still be the lowest taxed jurisdiction in Canada. If we carry on with business as usual, our citizens will be shortchanged, and future generations will be put at a disadvantage. Accordingly, I'm hopeful that tomorrow's budget will address a more fair and reasonable taxation policy in order that Albertans can have a real conversation about what our future should look like before the election, not after.

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

Black History Month

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today in celebration of Black History Month 2012. Every year since Canada's Parliament passed an act in 1995 to recognize these celebrations, Canadians from coast to coast to coast have taken pause to reflect on the many contributions of black Canadians from the dawn of our history to modern times. I've been asked many times: why the need to celebrate black history? My response: black history is really just Canadian history with a little colour.

Mr. Speaker, we have much to celebrate from those who settled on our east coast, whether they were Maroons from my homeland of Jamaica in the 1600s or came via the Underground Railroad, fleeing slavery in the southern U.S. A large group came to Alberta at the turn of the 20th century and formed famous settlements such as Amber Valley, Campsie, in your constituency, Mr. Speaker, Wildwood, and Breton, west of my home in Leduc.

Mr. Speaker, the descendants of these pioneers were not only great farmers and ranchers and ball players. They became great political leaders like Lincoln Alexander, the former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and Willie O'Ree, the first black player in the NHL, long before Grant Fuhr and Georges Laraque. We have been blessed with great artists like Oscar Peterson; medical greats like renowned cancer specialist Dr. Tony Fields of Alberta Health Services; humanitarians like Dr. Fil Fraser, a chair of the Alberta Human Rights Commission and also a well-known author and broadcaster; and the list goes on and on.

As the first serving member of our community to sit in this esteemed Assembly, Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pride along with the Member for Calgary-North West, the second such member, to encourage all Albertans to join us and use the many events planned over the next month to learn more about the many contributions made by black Canadians. I'd like to congratulate all the volunteers who put these celebrations together.

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

Cabinet Tour

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago the Alberta government went on a cabinet tour at taxpayers' expense supposedly to listen to Albertans, yet it was heavily criticized by Albertans, by the media, and even by the former Treasury Board president, now the independent Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, as a charade. It's so refreshing to hear Albertans who call a spade a shovel.

That being said, I witnessed 18 cabinet ministers come to my hometown of Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital of the world, in case they hadn't heard. In fact, they didn't travel highway 63. All 18 cabinet ministers flew in, unlike the families. We travel the highway. They should try travelling it sometime.

I thank all the organizers of the Golden Years Society, who set up a meeting with ministers to talk about a long-term care centre that was promised four years ago but has not yet broken ground.

The Minister of Health and Wellness, the Minister of Seniors, and the Minister of Infrastructure, the Member for Athabasca-Redwater, were all there. Interestingly, they heard from Mr. Dave McNeilly. He ended the meeting as an 80-year-old resident who is very well respected. He built our community for over 40 years, and he's a former school principal. Interestingly, he told the ministers that he was one of the first six citizens who formed the Conservative Party back in 1968 with Peter Lougheed. But he remarked 40 years later that this government and these ministers are acting just like that government then. They were no longer listening. The question he asked was: why are you no longer listening? It can be quite simple. Listen to us, the grassroots Albertans, and you will be rewarded. He believes that because you're not listening, you will be punished in the next provincial election.

Sheldon Kennedy

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to recognize an outstanding Albertan and a constituent of Highwood, Mr. Sheldon Kennedy. Sheldon's NHL career spanned eight years, including two seasons with the Calgary Flames. It was during his time in Calgary that Sheldon made the courageous decision to charge his major junior hockey league coach with sexual assault for the abuse he suffered over a five-year period while a teenager under his care.

Mr. Kennedy's story has resonated throughout the world, bringing much-needed attention to the problem of sexual abuse of young athletes. Being a victim himself, Sheldon has done a tremendous job of raising awareness for the past 15 years. Through his cross-Canada in-line skating fundraiser, autobiography, and through Respect Group Inc., the company he cofounded, Sheldon has become a spokesman for many abuse survivors.

He has continued tirelessly with his efforts and recently presented his ideas to both the Canadian government in Ottawa and a U.S. subcommittee in Washington, DC. Sheldon has urged governments and sports groups to make training mandatory for anyone working with children and hopes that actions taken in Canada towards this can be a model for other countries to follow.

It takes a lot of courage to speak so openly about this subject and his experience, and it's humbling to witness someone take such a profound experience and transform it into the positive and empowering message Sheldon continues to share with all of us.

2:50

I would like to thank and commend Sheldon for the difference he has made and for shining the light on a very dark and serious subject. Today he remains a dedicated volunteer for community fundraisers in support of all youth sports, charities, schools, hospitals, wherever he is needed. Sheldon Kennedy, Highwood and indeed all of Alberta are proud to call you ours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Helmets to Hardhats Program

Mr. Elniski: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to applaud Alberta's new partnership with the national helmets to hardhats program. This nonprofit program connects Canadian Forces members with quality career training and employment opportunities in the construction industry. Alberta, Edmonton in particular, is home to many veterans and military personnel making the transition from active duty to civilian life.

Approximately 5,200 men and women on active service, disabled, or in the reserves leave the military each year in Canada. These soldiers are well trained and well prepared for a rewarding career in construction after their military service. Mr. Speaker, taking advantage of these skills will not only show support for the veterans in this province but provide a co-ordinated approach to ensuring that opportunities exist in the private sector.

Alberta has long been a leader in recognizing military certificates of achievement as the equivalent of trade certificates in 10 trades related to the construction, transportation, and hospitality sectors. Helmets to hardhats opportunities are not limited to on-site construction jobs or apprenticeships. Openings in administration, engineering, human resources, and other skills are part of the program.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we have a responsibility to serve our soldiers as they have served our country. Programs such as helmets to hardhats help us live up to this responsibility.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by many individuals from the constituency of Strathmore-Brooks. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to: urge the Government of Alberta to commit to having Highway #1 continue to pass through the Town of Strathmore, following its present route, and to abandon all plans to have Highway #1 by-pass the Town of Strathmore.

Thank you very much.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, do you have one for the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition?

Ms Blakeman: I do, and I have several for myself.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition a document that he and the rest of us consider truly bold and visionary and which

would improve the lives of Albertans, the 2012 Alberta Liberal platform. I will table that for your entertainment and education.

Further, I have several tablings from constituents. The first is from Barry Cattapan, who is asking the question again: will the Premier stick to her promise and raise the AISH money, and when would that be happening? That's from Barry.

The second tabling is from a constituent, Anna Koop. She is a computer science graduate and is very concerned over the cuts to the University of Alberta and the effect that has on the quality of education.

My third tabling is not from a constituent; it is from a frequent correspondent. She is writing about why Spray Lakes Sawmills has been given permission to clear-cut in the Castle when that is supposed to be a protected area and goes on to talk about the effect on the bears, which are black and grizzly bears.

My next tabling is a wonderful document called Poverty Costs: An Economic Case for a Preventative Poverty Reduction Strategy in Alberta. This document was launched either last week or Monday – I'm sorry; I can't remember – and was put together by both the Vibrant Communities Calgary, which is the city of Calgary, and Action to End Poverty in Alberta, which is a provincial organization. My thanks to Joe Ceci and the rest of the advisory council, writers, and researchers for this document. Very useful and valuable for us.

My final tabling, Mr. Speaker, is another document that has come from a great deal of community consultation, and this was produced and released in the city of Edmonton last week. It is the report of the Community Sustainability Task Force dated February 2012. The members of this task force included Michael Phair, Teresa Spinelli, Councillor Batty, Barbara Fung, Nancy MacDonald, Tegan Martin-Drysdale, Simon O'Byrne, Jana O'Connor, Trustee Cindy Olsen, Trustee Catherine Ripley, Christopher Smith, Rosalind Smith, Michael Splinter, Brian Staples, David Veitch, and Peter Wong. It's a very wide group of people in the city, the school boards, and the community, and I thank them very much for their work. It's how to rebuild the centre of Edmonton.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. The first comes from a lady by the name of Marilyn Marks, who has been an advocate for grandparents' rights and grandchildren's rights. Marilyn has created a website, which is www.albertagrandparents.ca, and has an e-mail address, albertagrandparents@shaw.ca. In working with Marilyn over the years, I've brought forward the motion on a unified family court and tried to better the lives of both grandparents and their grandchildren.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, consists of e-mails and four letters from the following individuals who are seeking the preservation of the Castle wilderness, many of whom have personally visited the Castle and all of whom believe that clear-cutting will damage the ecology, watershed, wildlife, and natural species and must be prohibited at all costs. These particular messages come from Jim Pissot, Hilah and Norman Simmons, Eileen Kosior, Bev Mazurick, Adam Storms, Marion Wright, Judy Huntley, Jeff Grossman, Brad Jones, Brian Horejsi, Derek Thompson, Madeline Wilson, Richard Burke, Ross McLean, John Groeneveld, Dorothy Dickson, Pam York, Daphne Smith, and Nicole Baker. They're the first of a series that I'll be tabling.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, do you

have one on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood?

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition signed by at this point 1,200 Albertans. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to take immediate action to regulate electricity prices, recognizing that electricity is an essential service."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In anticipation of Government Motions later in the afternoon but for the benefit of members I wanted to table a calendar relative to the anticipated budget main estimates schedule, which identifies where the various committees would meet and which committees are dealing with which budgets.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry; I made a mistake. I omitted the participation of the province of Alberta in the Elevate report of the Community Sustainability Task Force. My apologies to the Minister of Human Services, who participated in funding this project.

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." We have only one item left in here which may or may not be pertinent to the cause. If somebody would request to waive that, we would then be able to go to the next section, Tablings to the Clerk.

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Education, a memorandum dated December 22, 2011, from the hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Education, to the hon. Mr. Kowalski, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, providing information on how each school jurisdiction used its portion of the additional \$107 million in funding and a letter dated December 20, 2011, from the hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Education, to Mr. Anderson, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, responding to a question raised during Oral Question Period on December 6, 2011, regarding the selection of appropriate instructional resources in Alberta schools.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

- Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

The Speaker: This motion is not debatable.

[Government Motion 2 carried]

3. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

The Speaker: Once again this motion is not debatable.

[Government Motion 3 carried]

Consideration of Main Estimates

6. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the following procedures apply for the consideration of the 2012-2013 main estimates.
- (1) When they are laid before the Assembly, the main estimates stand referred to Committee of Supply and the policy field committees as outlined in the attached schedule.
 - (2) Standing Order 59.01(4) shall apply to consideration of the main estimates in policy field committees and in Committee of Supply except that after the time allocated to the third party in suborder (4)(c),
 - (a) for the next 20 minutes the members of the fourth party and the minister or the member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may speak, and
 - (b) for the next 20 minutes the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent members and the minister or the member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may speak.
 - (3) Standing Order 59.01(5) and (6) shall apply with any necessary modifications to the consideration of main estimates in Committee of Supply.
 - (4) Each department's estimates shall receive a minimum of three hours' consideration except for the estimates of Executive Council, which shall receive a minimum of two hours' consideration.
 - (5) When a department's estimates are considered by Committee of Supply, the committee's consideration shall continue until it is complete notwithstanding standing orders 3(1) and 4.
 - (6) A policy field committee shall commence its consideration of a department's estimates at 6:30 p.m. or, if the Assembly has adjourned later than 6 p.m., one half-hour after the Assembly adjourns for the day.
 - (7) After the Committee of Supply has concluded its consideration of a department's estimates, the committee rises and reports progress without question put. All votes on a department's estimates in Committee of Supply stand deferred until the date scheduled for the vote on the main estimates.
 - (8) The Committee of Supply shall vote on the main estimates on the evening of March 13, 2012, commencing at 7:30 p.m.
 - (9) Standing orders 59.01(1), (2), and (3), 59.03(3) and (4), and 60(1) shall not apply to the consideration of the 2012-2013 main estimates.

Schedule, 2012-2013 Main Estimates

February 9: Budget Address.

February 14, evening: Justice and Attorney General, Public Health and Safety PFC; Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations, Energy PFC.

February 15, evening: Municipal Affairs, Community Development PFC; Service Alberta, Finance PFC.
February 21, afternoon: Finance, Committee of Supply.
February 21, evening: Sustainable Resource Development, Energy PFC; Seniors, Public Health and Safety PFC.
February 22, afternoon: Executive Council, Committee of Supply.
February 22, evening: Energy, Energy PFC; Culture and Community Services, Community Development PFC.
March 5, evening: Solicitor General and Public Security, Public Health and Safety PFC; Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Community Development PFC.
March 6, afternoon: Education, Committee of Supply.
March 6, evening: Infrastructure, Finance PFC; Advanced Education and Technology, Education PFC.
March 7, afternoon: Health and Wellness, Committee of Supply.
March 7, evening: Environment and Water, Energy PFC; Treasury Board and Enterprise, Finance PFC.
March 12, evening: Agriculture and Rural Development, Energy PFC; Transportation, Finance PFC.
March 13, afternoon: Human Services, Committee of Supply.
March 13, evening: main estimates votes, Committee of Supply.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would move Government Motion 6, which deals with the consideration of the main estimates, in the manner in which it is printed in the Order Paper.

The Speaker: This motion is debatable. The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have considerable difficulties with where we have arrived for our budget debates at this point in time. Having served for I think this is now my 16th budget, I've been through a number of permutations of how these are considered. I think people in here are pretty well aware that I obey the rules. I actually embrace the rules. I think they're a way of us getting business done in this House, and for the most part – well, actually always – I obey them. If I don't like them, you're going hear me talk about it, and here we are. I'm going to talk about it.

At this point I seriously considered not participating in the budget debates this year because I have found that the process has reached a point where it's just not useful in the amount of information that we are able to pull out of the ministers, the amount of time that we have to actually have a back-and-forth debate. It's not a meaningful process anymore, and that grieves me. I want this process to work. I want my constituents to be able to read the *Hansard* and understand what went on. But right from the way the budget documents are presented nowadays – honestly, there is one line for Alberta Health Services for a \$17 billion expenditure. One line. No breakdown, no listing of services, no listing of programs, no division anywhere down from that. How are any of us supposed to try and debate that?

That's not only me, but it's members of your own caucus. I agree absolutely with the Minister of Finance that it is akin to something that comes out of the back end of a horse. I absolutely agree. He's putting that very well on my behalf. Thank you for that.

I hear in the throne speech that the Premier would like to revisit the entire way we do this, and I hope that is true. I hope that we do get a revamped way of doing this that is more useful to members

of the opposition, members of the media, and members of all parties that are in this House, because I have to say that where we're at now is so close to useless that I am really quite frustrated with it.

What we have before us now are a number of sort of restatements of the way we work through the budget debates in the policy field committees and the agreements about how much time different parties get to talk about it. I, in fact, negotiated some of this, but it really is a negotiation of diminishing returns, at the point where the Official Opposition has one hour – and half of that is allocated back to the minister – to try and debate a budget. No matter how large or how small or how controversial or how many people are affected by a budget, you get one hour, and you're getting approximately half of that. When you have ministers who are literally trained to not give you any kind of meaningful answer, it really just does become a silly game. I think that's a terrible thing to be saying about a budget process in a province as wealthy as Alberta with as much possibility and opportunity as Alberta.

Government Motion 6, as I said, lays out how much time everybody gets to speak. Please, you know, people that are following along at home, pick this up and read it. Go online and look at what this actually says. Really, members of the other opposition parties get 20 minutes to talk about any given ministry. Twenty minutes. Oh, yeah, there's a bit of time at the end, and anybody can go for it, but that's when all of the backbenchers like to go for it, too. So we're all on a long list, trying to get in a few questions and, even more importantly, some concrete, meaningful answers. Not to be blown off, not to be trivialized, not to have my intelligence demeaned but to actually get some answers would be nice.

You know what? Some ministers are actually really quite good at it, and there is a really good exchange. Some are not, and there's no way to call them to account. There's no way to make them come back and give you something after the fact. For most of the budgets that we have to vote on at the end of this process we will not have received the answers to our questions that were promised to us at the time. So if I was waiting to hear why a given minister made a certain choice and that depends on whether or not I support that ministry's budget and I don't even get the answer until four weeks after I've had to vote on this, how is that a meaningful exchange? How is that a good debate, good transparency, good accountability of what the government is putting in front of us? It's just not.

You know, we've got different changes in times for things now. We start these at 6:30, after we have finished doing legislative debate until 6. If you're trying to prepare for any of this, you'd better well do it fast. Of course, the government has an advantage on us there, and that's just our tough luck. They've got three shifts they can run during this time; we've got one. So we're likely to be on schedule in the afternoon, on duty, and then also have to pound our way over to the Annex and leap into our seat and start debating a different ministry.

Will I support what is now going on? You know, I have acknowledged that I have been part of the debate on this, but I have to stand up and say that I just cannot support this anymore. This is not meaningful. This has been perverted beyond the sense of a meaningful budget debate, and it does not allow in many cases now for even – we used to have budget debates, and people would come and sit in the galleries and listen. I had dozens of seniors come for a Seniors' debate once. Well, these debates: there are only a couple of them that take place in the afternoon, in daylight, in sunlight, in this Assembly, where it is possible for people to come and listen.

Now, if they want to come at night, they can go to the Annex and try and get their way through security there and try and find the right room and squish themselves into a seat at the back. There's no additional opportunity for them to get any kind of electronic assistance if they need to be able to read something or closed captioning or anything like that. It's just unpleasant. As a result, now we don't have anybody that comes to listen to those debates.

I just have to put this on the record. This process is not working, and I can't support it. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on this motion.

3:10

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I would like to reinforce what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has just said. I haven't been here quite as long as she has, but I think in six or seven budgets it's become more and more disappointing, first of all, in the information that we're given. It's line items. As stewards of the taxpayers and how that money is being spent, there's just no information there on what the breakdown is and how this is being spent.

I find it quite amusing that the government is going to go through its own personal assessed-based budgeting. It's just comical to me to hear them say that. You know, what have they been doing for the last 40 years?

The process that's set up, the amount of time that is allocated to the different members: it's just almost meaningless to take the time to prepare, to ask questions. When you're not the Official Opposition, you even have less time. Then the ministers, again, take up half of that time just pontificating in an almost laughable state on why you're even questioning anything that they have in their budget.

The process is not one that puts the interests of Albertans first. I would've thought that with this Premier and her idea of new budgeting to get better value for tax dollars – I don't think there are better eyes than to be more open with the books and to show the expanded items and how they're broken down and where they're being spent and the contracts that are out there. We could actually go through the contracts that are out there. None of those things, Mr. Speaker, are available to us as opposition members.

Again, the biggest problem is that the time to debate these different ministerial budgets is very, very short. The Premier today got up and said that, you know, she's going to debate this budget and pass it, then go forward, when, in fact, there are enough holes in this budget that you could drive semi trucks with cash through there and not know where they're spending it or how it's actually being spent.

Some Hon. Members: You haven't even seen it yet.

Mr. Hinman: If past budgets are any indication of future budgets, we don't need to see it. We listen to the Finance minister saying that we haven't seen it yet. I wonder whether he's seen it.

It's even more comical that they went out in February on a tour to say, "Oh, what do Albertans want in our budget?" when it was already printed. I mean, they're talking about going through the budget and no unjustified increases. How can you know whether something is justified or not when all you have is a one-line item saying, you know: procurement for health equipment, \$1.2 billion? It's just ridiculous, Mr. Speaker.

So I, too, have to stand and reinforce what has been said by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and say that it's very disap-

pointing, the amount of time that is allocated to discussing the budget, but even more disappointing is what little information we actually have.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to rise and outline concerns that have been similarly raised by the two previous speakers. I'm sure I've said previously in debate about the experience that I enjoyed being fairly closely involved in the legislative process in other jurisdictions. I recall working very closely with ministers in the province of B.C., who were compelled to subject themselves and their ministries to estimates debate until such time as the opposition was finished asking questions. I know. It's a shocking idea.

In comparison, when I came here and discovered that we would be discussing \$15 billion in three hours, I was really quite shocked. And I will say that having only been here since 2008, I never was part of this discussion. I've never actually thought it was particularly a functional process, and I continue to believe that.

This particular schedule, however, is even more offensive than what we've had to deal with over the course of my tenure here. When I first got elected, we would have one ministry a day, which in our caucus of two would allow us one day to prepare when you weren't also debating legislation and one day, then, to participate. Then about two years into it or a year into it we decided that we were going to have two ministries a day, which, obviously, for our small caucus meant that we were engaging in estimates debate and a thorough though very frantic review of the budget documents and background documents and annual reports and previous debates and media information and consulting with stakeholders and all that stuff every day because there were two of us. Now we have three ministries on a day.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, regardless of whether we're talking about the NDP caucus, which currently only has two members, the Wildrose caucus that has four, or the Liberal caucus with their eight, the fact of the matter is that this structure is a bullying structure. It is a structure that bullies the opposition into a process that is meant to look ever so slightly like it resembles a proper budgeting debate, an opportunity for members of the public to speak to their representatives and engage in significantly important decisions for the province of Alberta and the people of this province. But it's not that anymore, not with this particular structure. The change to three ministries a day makes, quite honestly, a farce out of the process, and under no circumstances could we ever vote for this schedule.

Now, in addition, I've also raised with the House leader, as he knows, that notwithstanding attempts in the past to ensure that members of the opposition who have critic areas in more than one ministry do not have their critic areas double-booked, obviously, when you're trying to fit three ministries a day into the schedule, it is not possible to avoid double-booking. In my case for at least two ministries that I am responsible for as a critic, the debate occurs at the same time, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development and the Ministry of Seniors occur at the same time, and I'm the critic for both areas.

These are not minor ministries. These are ministries that have significant implications for the people of this province. The Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development is responsible for the land-use framework. While this government has done really nothing but meet and issue press releases on that particular area for a long time, the fact of the matter is that were they ever to do something on it, it would have profound implications for people

throughout this province. The Ministry of Seniors is one of the areas that represents the biggest single failure of this government over the course of the last four years. It represents a daily reminder of a broken election promise from 2008. The money that is spent through this ministry is very important to a critically involved and engaged group of Albertans. As the NDP critic for both of those ministries, I really am, of course, quite insulted by the fact that we are unable to adjust it so that I'm not double-booked.

We hear a lot about, "Oh, well, this minister has an engagement in his riding, so we can't have him that day, so it's going to have to be a different day" and whatever the case may be. But at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that when you are scheduling three ministries on the same day, there are invariably going to be conflicts like that. That's why we shouldn't be scheduling three ministries on the same day.

That's why that whole process, as I said at the outset, is a clear example of bullying tactics on the part of a government that has become so enraptured with the size of its own majority that it has lost touch with the importance of the work that is done in this Legislature and the amount of work that is done by members of the opposition in this Legislature on behalf of all Albertans, whether we represent them as elected representatives or not. Our parliamentary democracy is not a representative democracy. It relies upon a robust opposition role on a daily basis regardless of what constituency you're from and what group of people you represent. This process negates that role and shows a profound disrespect, frankly, for this forum within which that role is supposed to be played out.

I cannot support this schedule, and I think that if this schedule is any evidence of the new administration's belief in transparency and democracy and citizen participation, then it is clear evidence that things have not only not changed, but they are in fact deteriorating for the worse. So it's a very unfortunate day that we have to address this motion. I'm sure the government will use its majority to pass it, but I think that it's a sad day for Albertans who are concerned about participating in a meaningful way in these kinds of important decisions.

Thank you.

3:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, which affords five minutes for questions and comments. Would anyone like to participate under that segment?

Are there additional speakers on this motion?

Shall I call on the hon. Government House Leader to close debate? Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't be long, but I do want to indicate that, far from bullying, this process is quite consistent with what is in the standing orders, which allows for debate of estimates to be referred to the policy field committees, not more than two to meet at the same time. That is what's happening.

What this really does is bring 75 per cent of the public spending back into Committee of Supply in the House, to be done in the afternoon in the full light of day. It was mentioned by one of the members of the opposition in speaking that this is somehow not being done in the light of day. Seventy-five per cent of the estimates in five departments in Committee of Supply in the afternoon: that makes it available to everyone who wants to come and be in the galleries or whatever. The committee rooms that we have are available for the public to come. Nothing is hidden there. It is a perfectly valid and appropriate process to have 75 per cent

of the estimates in the House, and then some of the other estimate departments, which are smaller in nature, go into the policy field committees as provided for in the standing orders.

This motion doesn't really change that much. It just allows for the same process to be used in Committee of Supply as is used in the policy field committees, sets the date for the vote, and sets the schedule. That's quite an appropriate process notwithstanding the protestations of the members opposite.

What the members opposite are really saying is that they don't have enough members to cover all the topics that come before the House at any given time, and that's probably true. You know, it is difficult. All members in the House have to pick the topics that they want to debate on because no parliamentary democracy, no Legislature in the world operates on the basis that every one of its members speaks to every one of the topics on the table at a time. Can you imagine the federal House of Commons, with I think it's – what? – 304 members now, having every member speak on every topic?

The Speaker: That debate is now concluded.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

Evening Sitings

8. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet in the evening on the following dates:

- (a) on February 13, 2012, for consideration of the 2011-12 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, to be followed by consideration of government business;
- (b) on March 13, 2012, following the vote on the 2012-13 main estimates and the report from Committee of Supply, for consideration of government business; and
- (c) commencing March 14, 2012, every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday for the remainder of the 2012 spring sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 4(1) this motion is not debatable, so I'll call the question.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

Committee Membership Changes

9. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the following changes to

- (a) the Standing Committee on Public Health and Safety be approved: that Mr. Rodney replace Mr. Ouellette;
- (b) the Standing Committee on Energy be approved: that Mr. Ouellette replace Mr. Rodney.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this motion is debatable if someone would like to participate.

Okay. I will call the question.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly honoured to rise today to move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. It is a privilege to do this on behalf of my constituents in Calgary-North Hill, which I have had the honour of serving, my neighbours, for the last four years.

I would like to begin by thanking the Lieutenant Governor for both his wonderful words and his commitment to this great province. I would also like to thank him for formally beginning this Fifth Session of the 27th Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, His Honour's distinguished career as both a member of the Canadian armed forces and as a military adviser and as a volunteer with humanitarian causes should be looked upon with the utmost respect by all members of this Legislature and of all Albertans. I also commend his dedication to continue serving the people of Alberta.

The Lieutenant Governor stated that he arrived in this province in the early '50s as a young soldier and that he has observed firsthand how far we have come as a province. His experience and insights are a testament to a long tradition of hard work and perseverance seen in Alberta, characteristics that have helped this province become a world leader in industry, research, and the production of natural resources.

I would like to extend thanks and gratitude also to our hon. Premier. The past year has been an incredibly demanding year for her, and she has served in the office of Premier with integrity, fierce dedication, and unwavering loyalty to the people of Alberta. Under her guidance Alberta continues to be a place with strong leadership, innovative solutions, and unlimited opportunity.

Alberta not only continues to weather the lingering economic downturn better than any jurisdiction in Canada and North America, but it also remains a prosperous place to do business. I ask any member of this Legislature or any Albertan: where else would you rather be than right here right now in Alberta? This is our province, and this is our time to shine, our time to secure the quality of life and prosperity of today for future generations, to which every human being on this planet aspires.

While opportunities for this great province are plentiful, this government recognizes that building a land of opportunity for all comes with many challenges. As His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor stated in the throne speech yesterday, "Albertans expect better and demand excellence." The hon. Premier has continued to listen and respond to what is most important to Albertans, focusing on the core building blocks of a great society, things such as education, health care, and maintaining a strong economy.

This government recognizes that generations of Albertans have worked hard to create the many advantages that we enjoy today, and today we are obliged to do the same for future generations of Albertans, Mr. Speaker. However, this government also recognizes that we face many difficulties in a modern society that requires innovative solutions, because exponential change is the only constant that we have today. Decisions that we make toward the continued prosperity of this province require a resilient and

dedicated vision, a vision with a clear purpose which has a healthy, educated, and prosperous populace at its core. Together this government will ensure that our choices will be deliberate and will help improve our quality of life and secure our future prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, you as well as many in this Legislature would know that I was ecstatic to hear the Lieutenant Governor state this government's commitment to establishing a long-term fiscal framework for our province. This is something that I've long been advocating since being elected to represent the people of Calgary-North Hill. This starts with the Premier's groundbreaking commitment to results-based budgeting as introduced by her as the first bill of this legislative session. Efficiency and responsibility are themes that I often hear at the doors in my constituency, and I am sure they are echoed right across this province. This bill will challenge the automatic growth of spending by assigning funds where they are needed. It will require a zero-based budgeting process to ensure good value for taxpayers' dollars. Every three years each government department and program will come under close scrutiny as to the need, outcome achievement, and efficiency of its existence.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, myself and a number of my hon. colleagues in this Legislature have long advocated for such a robust and institutional review of government programs and spending. As a result of the leadership from this Premier we are now going to make significant progress and achievement in this area. As someone who has significant professional experience in program evaluations and as the parliamentary assistant for Treasury Board and Enterprise I look forward to the potential impact of this on future generations of Albertans because it will allow us to allocate money in a disciplined and intelligent manner while continuing to move the quality of life enjoyed by all Albertans forward.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to touch base on the other aspects of establishing a long-term fiscal framework for this province that were highlighted by His Honour yesterday. He indicated that this government will review the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the sustainability fund, capital spending and infrastructure projects, gaming revenue, and income taxes. I fully support this type of dialogue and contemplation. As the hon. Lieutenant Governor said yesterday, "Long-established ways are being called into question, and comfortable assumptions are being examined anew."

The future prosperity and quality of life of this province will depend on this type of thinking. It will ensure that Alberta will remain in its position of having the strongest fiscal position and the most competitive tax structure in all of North America. As a result, Alberta will continue to be a beacon for investment and for those seeking opportunity, fortifying our already robust economy for future generations. A strong economy leads to an improved quality of life and a greater investment in health care and education, which in turn foster further progress and prosperity. Albertans understand that this is the foundation of our success and so does this government, Mr. Speaker.

Education is another pillar to the foundation of our success. As the Lieutenant Governor mentioned, "The nature of work and progress is changing, and as technology advances, the demand for highly skilled, educated workers will increase." Mr. Speaker, my constituency of Calgary-North Hill is home to many young professionals and their families that recognize the importance of a quality education.

Calgary has become one of the major epicentres of technology and business across North America, and it is imperative that Albertans are equipped with the necessary tools and skills to

thrive in the global knowledge economy. This means exposing all of our youth from a young age to positive learning environments that incite curiosity and that they have a thirst for knowledge. Our K to 12 education system is widely recognized as one of the best in the world. I support this Premier in raising the bar in this area.

Ironically, Mr. Speaker, raising the bar in public education was a slogan that I used in my campaign for election to the public school board about seven years ago, in my first foray into elected public service. I believed then and I'm even more convinced today that education is the great equalizer of opportunity in our society. We must not waver from trying to improve and build upon success in this area. The future prosperity and progress of this province depends on it. The quality of life of future Albertans depends on it. I am thankful that the hon. Premier shares the same passion and vision in this area as I do.

As an active member of the community through coaching baseball and football, I also appreciate the importance of encouraging youth to be active at a young age. The physical and mental benefits from such activities are so important to the well-being and quality of life of all individuals. However, as people continue to live longer, access to primary care becomes more and more essential. I'm excited, Mr. Speaker, about the way our government is moving forward on health care. By allowing front-line staff to handle more duties and responsibilities of health care professionals such as nurse practitioners, this government has taken steps to improve efficiency in the health care system.

Moreover, the expansion of community-based care through the introduction of family care clinics staffed by multidisciplinary teams further demonstrates the commitment of this province towards providing the most efficient and accessible health care system possible. Albertans expect a health care system that responds to the needs of their community and that maximizes the use of resources available, and these values are understood by our Premier.

This understanding is also true when it comes to Alberta's energy strategy. The role that the energy industry plays is vital to our collective prosperity and the livelihoods of many families in my constituency and in our province. If done right, the advantages of our natural resources can secure an unparalleled quality of life and secure prosperity for multiple generations of Albertans.

I have no doubt that this government and our Premier will stand up for the interests of our province when it comes to natural resource development, and that starts with recognizing the need for Alberta to diversify its customer base and not to be too reliant on the United States for our energy exports. I agree with the Lieutenant Governor that we must access global markets with respect to our energy resources in order to achieve our greatest returns on those resources. I also agree with him that all Albertans share a deep love and respect for the environment. Our government must not forget that Albertans understand that in this province what is economic is environmental and what is environmental is economic.

Moving forward with an environmental monitoring plan that is credible, transparent, and science based in concert with the federal government is a step in the right direction to ensure that Alberta continues to have the social licence with Albertans and with the rest of the world to develop our resources. This is all part of a nation-building exercise that is being led by our Premier, Mr. Speaker, a process where all Canadians will see and realize the tremendous economic benefits of our vast natural resources, which are demanded right across the world. With allies and like-minded governments in B.C. and Saskatchewan and Ottawa and with the west leading the country in economic and population growth, our Premier recognizes the opportunity that is on our horizon, and she

is ready to lead and to seize the opportunities that come along with this for all Albertans.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his inspiring words and his dedicated public service. I also again would like to thank the hon. Premier for her leadership and vision. As I go door to door talking to my constituents in Calgary-North Hill, I sense an optimism that is so strong, so prideful. Albertans have confidence in their government, they have confidence in their fellow Albertans, but most importantly they have confidence in themselves. This reflects the leadership style and grace that this Premier has shown in her short but successful time in office to date. I believe that under her guidance and with the dedication and spirit of the people of Alberta we are about to embark on what will be a truly special and remarkable time in the history of this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been an honour to be able to comment on His Honour's Speech from the Throne yesterday.

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

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In this my second term as MLA for Calgary-Lougheed it is with great respect and appreciation that I rise today to second the motion to accept the speech from the throne. Yesterday's speech was extremely significant. It marks a sea change for Alberta, a bright, new era under the guidance of our new Premier, who I am personally convinced will prove over time to be a great leader and visionary, one who will leave a lasting impact on Alberta as she reshapes it with all of us for the 21st century.

As such, I feel incredibly fortunate to have been invited to second this remarkable Speech from the Throne and speak about the vision that our leader and this government have for our great province. The throne speech presents a clear outline of what our government will do to ensure that Albertans can reach their full potential. As parents of two young boys my wife and I chose to live in this extraordinary province for this very reason, and it's also just one of the reasons why we choose to stay.

3:40

As our Premier has often stated, "Alberta is opportunity," but we have not reached this state of affairs by accident. Our leaders and our governments have not been afraid to be bold and make bold decisions using a plan based on the expectations of Albertans. We've done this in the past, and with this leader and this government we will stay true to that tradition and make our future brighter than it's ever been. Alberta's entrepreneurs received confirmation of this yesterday when it was announced that businesses have a government that will help them adapt and build a province that present and future generations will be proud of.

We all know that Alberta is the most economically free jurisdiction in North America, and this government will keep us in first place. But we cannot continue without strong fiscal discipline, so it was good to hear our Lieutenant Governor announce our government's stance on smart spending, improved competitiveness, and predictable three-year funding cycles for education, advanced education, and municipalities. Mr. Speaker, having spoken with stakeholders for many years now, I know that this is exactly what they have been asking for. I also know that they're very interested in our new budgetary review process, which includes a results-based approach, one that will allow for a thorough examination of how public spending is achieving outcomes for Albertans on a rotating three-year cycle.

Having had the honour of working on Treasury Board, I know that our government treats Albertans' money with the same care and respect that they do, spending wisely on services Albertans count on for an outstanding quality of life. That's exactly what we were reminded of yesterday. But that means little unless we continue to give every Albertan the opportunity to benefit from cutting-edge education, from kindergarten through to postsecondary, so that everyone can achieve their full potential. And, Mr. Speaker, we will. It was very encouraging to hear that in yesterday's speech.

However, Mr. Speaker, the speech also went much further. It portrayed our province as what it is, a leader in helping to solve many of the world's challenges in energy, water, food, health, and improving our quality of life. Proof of that came just days ago when we announced an ongoing partnership between our government and the government of Canada in enhancing the monitoring of water, air, land, and biodiversity in the oil sands.

The speech also focused on an issue that is always at the forefront of Albertans' minds, and that of course is health care. During our recent cabinet tour I was encouraged to hear that Albertans are excited about the success of our primary care networks. Yesterday's throne speech promised to build on this with the plan – and I repeat the word "plan" – to expand community-based care through the introduction of family care clinics staffed by multidisciplinary teams of health care professionals. Patients in need of medical attention will be able to get it quickly and easily at publicly funded clinics close to home. As parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness I am looking forward to joining our minister, our Premier, and our colleagues in making family care clinics a reality.

There was even more concrete evidence of this with the announcement that our government will begin the implementation of three pilot projects this spring. Now, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that Albertans are extremely pleased about this, and I'm not referring only to doctors, nurses, and support staff with whom I've spoken but also to patients of all ages all around the province.

Speaking of which, I know that our seniors were delighted to hear that our government will provide them with the supports and services and care that they need to remain healthy and happy and productive. This includes measures to help them stay in the peaceful security of their own homes, surrounded by the warmth of family for as long as possible.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's no surprise that many people are also very concerned about issues like property rights. Albertans want the freedom to run their own lives, and they want to take charge of their own destinies, so I trust that they were pleased with yesterday's promise to strengthen their property rights using what we learned in public consultations. Our government will use Albertans' contributions to make common-sense decisions on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I have also learned that Albertans across the province are applauding the assurances that our government will co-operate closely and openly with Ottawa, building on our strong relationship with the federal government, that they will proudly tell our Albertan story, and that they will promote Albertans' visions and actions on the world stage.

There is no question that Albertans have been extremely successful in the past, but if we're to continue to prosper, our government knows that we cannot take any of this for granted, and that is why I was so pleased to hear our Lieutenant Governor refer to the many innovative ways that our government is investing in tomorrow, including strengthening our postsecondary sector and developing new strategies to attract talent from across the country and around the world.

But, as you know, Mr. Speaker, it all starts at home, so I was very heartened to hear that this government will continue to strengthen its ties with Métis and First Nations communities. As my constituents in Calgary-Lougheed have attested to many times when I've visited them at their doors, they know that our lives are often inextricably linked together, and I expect that our hon. colleagues from around Alberta have had similar realizations in their communities. I am eager to continue efforts to find common ground with our neighbours in Calgary-Lougheed as well as with other Métis and First Nations communities across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, our initiatives will certainly help to ensure that Alberta will continue to thrive in the future, but they have also been developed to help create an important balance between a vibrant economy, strong communities, and a healthy environment for generations to come. In his speech yesterday the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor shared with Albertans the vision that this government has for our future, and that vision spoke to the family man in me, it spoke to the educator and entrepreneur in me, and it spoke to a lifelong interest that I've had in healthy living. For these reasons and many more I'm looking forward to playing a part in realizing our vision, and I'm gratified that Albertans are feeling the same way as well.

Now, as I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I'll share just a short personal story relating the Speech from the Throne to my high school social studies teacher, who taught me that government, when done well, is one of the greatest agents of positive social change available to human beings and that when we've gained enough experience and expertise, we owe it to ourselves and our fellow citizens to give back. I believe that he'd be pleased to know that I am convinced it is an incredible honour and opportunity and obligation to be a member of this honourable Assembly with you and all of our colleagues. With humility, I dare say that my teacher would be very proud of yesterday's Speech from the Throne, which outlined our province's promising future, including the understanding that our Premier and our government are focusing our resources in areas that will help all Albertans to achieve their full potential.

As our Lieutenant Governor stated,

Alberta can be proud of rich natural resources, North America's most competitive business environment, and a vibrant technology and innovation sector that helps push human achievement to unparalleled heights . . . It is Albertans who will always remain the central focus of this government.

It will help all Albertans reach their full potential, setting the stage for future generations to enjoy even greater success.

With that, I thank you and all of our colleagues, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his service to our province and our nation. As the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition it's an honour for me to respond to the Speech from the Throne for this Fifth Session of the 27th Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, as I give my response to yesterday's Speech from the Throne, I'm going to be very honest. Much of what I'm going to say today will not be welcomed by those members of this House who serve in the current government, but I feel it is of vital importance to speak the truth about the problems we face in Alberta and how the current government has failed to deal with them, so in advance I say: sorry if the truth I speak today is going to bruise their egos.

3:50

Now, I want to start my response to the Speech from the Throne by recognizing the positive aspect of it. I say "aspect" in the singular very deliberately. After sitting through yesterday's very dull and unimaginative speech and after reading it very carefully, I could

find only one good thing to say about it, and here it is. Finally, this government admits that there is a revenue problem. You know what they say: even a stopped clock tells the correct time twice a day. So the current government was bound to get at least one thing right.

This aspect of the speech was good, and I congratulate the Premier on admitting there is a revenue problem. Now I encourage her to take the truly Liberal strategy of progressive taxes to fix it. I encourage the Premier to follow the lead of the Official Opposition and to introduce the fair tax system we unveiled on Monday, which sees no increases to the rates paid by 90 per cent of Albertans but would raise income taxes on larger corporations and those with taxable incomes of more than \$100,000 a year. This is just one of many bold and visionary measures we announced on Monday which have our province buzzing.

[Mr. Zwodzesky in the chair]

The Premier hints at tax change, and I hope she will follow our lead by increasing the rate on larger corporations from 10 to 12 per cent and by leaving small- and medium-sized businesses alone. I also hope that she will follow our lead and only increase tax rates on the top 10 per cent of Albertans because, heaven knows, the 90 per cent, who don't earn six-figure taxable incomes, are being squeezed enough already by this current government.

There is one area where our current government squeezes everyone equally. Seniors, those living on AISH, small-, medium-, and large-sized businesses, families: all Albertans are feeling the squeeze when it comes to power bills. The throne speech didn't mention electricity deregulation once, and it's easy to see why. It's been an abject failure. It is time for smart changes to the system which will cut Albertans' power bills and protect us from profiteering power generators and transmitters. This government should follow our lead and increase the powers and resources of the Market Surveillance Administrator so we can have open, efficient, and competitive marketplaces. Follow our lead and create new rules allowing utilities to save on generation and pass those savings on to Albertans. Follow our lead and get rid of those laughable fines which actually make it profitable for power companies to distort the market. It's time to bring in penalties that match the magnitude of the offence. Follow our lead on this.

Another of the many ways Albertans are being squeezed is through school fees. School fees are nothing but a tax on families, pure and simple. It is one of the most regressive taxes imaginable. Now, I can understand taxing cigarettes. I'm a doctor, after all, so I see the value in that. But taxing education? Why tax education as though it's a pack of smokes? It just doesn't make sense. We believe education should be properly funded instead and that school fees should be eliminated. It seems a lot of Albertans agree with us, and I encourage the current government to follow our lead.

This government should also stop squeezing postsecondary students. Follow our lead and create endowments out of our growing resource revenue so that by 2025 postsecondary tuition will be free. As a first step follow our lead by capping and lowering tuition for undergraduate students by \$250 immediately.

Mr. Speaker, it's not just our people who are being squeezed by the government. Our cities, towns, neighbourhoods need a new deal. We call on the government to follow our lead by delivering new funding through the establishment of a municipal heritage fund, which would begin providing and creating stable, sustainable funding for local governments and creating long-term infrastructure solutions.

Follow our lead and draft city charters for Edmonton and Calgary so that they will have the powers they need to tackle their own unique challenges. Follow our lead and directly fund neighbourhood associations across the province with 25 per cent of the municipal heritage fund's earnings, which will enable citizens to turn their neighbourhood's priorities into reality. This government would be well advised to follow our lead and reinstate community lottery boards. This would put an end to politicians using this money to throw perks around. Follow our lead and get politicians out of the process so that spending priorities reflect the needs of communities.

Perhaps most disturbing of all is the fact that our seniors are being squeezed by government. Right now in Alberta, the wealthiest province in Canada, many seniors are having to ask themselves: can I afford to have a bath today? They have to ask this question because of this government's shameful record of underfunding home care. Our seniors, who only get one paragraph in the Speech from the Throne, built this province, but the current government won't provide the funding needed to keep senior families together and to keep these families in their homes. This government should follow our lead and double the funding of home care so that this stops happening.

This government should follow our lead and increase the supply of nonprofit community-based lodges and nonprofit long-term care beds, too. Follow our lead by increasing the quality of long-term care, requiring on-site registered nurses, and by enacting guarantees of service to ensure a proper level of care. For heaven's sake, please follow our lead and embrace the principle that senior couples should not be split up because of health or financial needs.

Mr. Speaker, our health care system is also being squeezed by the current government. It is interesting that in five paragraphs on health care it talks twice about publicly funded health care but not once about publicly delivered health care. Is privatization being considered? This current government would do better to follow our lead instead and fix our public health care system.

I just discussed the neglect of our seniors, and it is this neglect that is impacting the health care system overall. We need more long-term care beds so that seniors are not languishing in hospital beds, which in turn leads to cancellation of surgeries and congested emergency rooms. This leads to our paramedics spending too much of their time waiting with patients for a bed to come open and not enough time getting back out on the road to answer the next 911 call for help. Follow our lead and fix this problem. Follow our lead and guarantee surgery and emergency department wait times. Follow our lead and get every Albertan a family doctor and a wellness team.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, yesterday's throne speech was a very dull, unimaginative speech. With all the problems facing our province, Albertans have the right to expect a throne speech with vision and thoughtful proposals. Instead, all the current government could manage to offer was a tedious, hour-long drone of clichés, platitudes, and stale slogans. The reason for this is really quite simple. This current government is old, tired, and out of ideas. It is also very many years removed from the time it was a force for solutions. It is now simply the source of our problems. This is subliminally acknowledged near the end of the throne speech through lines like, "It will revitalize publicly funded health care services to increase access and suit an aging population with diverse needs." Who brought our health care system to such a state of disarray and dysfunction that it needs to be revitalized in the first place? This current government.

Another line. "It will revamp Alberta's education system so all graduates can hit the ground running and contribute more effectively than ever." Who brought our education system to such a sorry state that we have the highest high school dropout rate in the country? This current government.

Here's another revealing line. "History has shown us that short-term focus can result in long-term problems." Indeed. The past 20 years under this government prove this to be absolutely true. Once again, even a stopped clock tells the correct time twice a day. The line that is followed by this is: "Your government will address the root causes of problems rather than just respond to symptoms. Albertans expect better and demand excellence."

Now the current government has returned to getting things wrong. This government is the root cause of the problems in Alberta. Albertans do indeed expect better and demand excellence, and this is why the members opposite ought to be very, very, very worried. The current government is squeezing families through school fees. They are squeezing those who don't earn six-figure taxable incomes. They are squeezing our cities, towns, neighbourhoods. They are squeezing our health care system. Worst of all, they are squeezing our seniors. Our seniors. From womb to tomb this government is the root cause of the problem.

Mr. Speaker, the current government no longer is a force for good in this province. No longer. And through the evasive jargon of the throne speech one truth manages to shine through: it's time for this government to go.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone who wishes to question or comment on the speech just given. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. I would like to ask the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition when exactly it was that the government lost its way.

Dr. Sherman: This government lost its way yesterday, the day before, the day before that. It lost its way in the '90s. This government has lost the moral authority to govern this province.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing no one else, I would ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore to please proceed with his comments on the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for the opportunity to rise today and offer a few of my thoughts on the government's Speech from the Throne. First, I'd like to congratulate the Lieutenant Governor on his delivery of the speech yesterday. I would also like to join my colleagues in this House in expressing my gratitude and sense of celebration, after 60 years of service, to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

I had a grandmother, who has now gone on, that was a great supporter of the monarchy. She loved Queen Elizabeth, and we often talked about her. We had the privilege when I was very young to have Lieutenant Governor Grant MacEwan to a private dinner. That was quite a thrill when I was young. He talked about such books as *John Ware's Cow Country* and other exciting things. I appreciate the Lieutenant Governors that we've had in the past and the current one and the service that they do here for Alberta.

I was hoping that under the new Premier this government would articulate a vision and resonate with Albertans. Instead, we got a speech that lacked vision entirely and did little to address the

rising concerns of Albertans in this province. The first piece of legislation in this session does nothing to guarantee that this government will address the bloated size of government and end their record of out-of-control spending.

In the past months, where this government has spent \$70,000 on lavish getaways to Jasper park and pre-election cabinet tours, it's obvious that this government doesn't have a record of and doesn't understand or realize the importance of prioritizing the hard-earned tax dollars from Albertans. Under this government's new fiscal framework for results-based budgeting – and I think that that's comical. I think that the result of their budgeting has been deficit after deficit, and all that is going to show is more results of poor planning, poor prioritizing. The fact exists: no guarantee of eliminating any government waste.

The government says that it's planning to secure our economic future with smart spending. Well, what has it done in the past? Is it saying that this cabinet and all of them that are here – there's nobody new in this House from four years ago. We've had one member resign, that is no longer here, and they seemed to be able to kick him as he left as if he was the only one who spoke. I do realize that they have trained tongues and only speak for him other than the brief opportunity during a leadership race where all of a sudden new ideas or sharp tongues come out criticizing the government on where it has been. How can they possibly as a group start to talk about smart spending, Mr. Speaker, when they are the ones that have been spending for the last four years? It's just totally hypocritical.

To go on, this government has no credible record to boast anything about spending other than how well they can spend other people's money. There is \$2 billion that will be spent, and much has been spent, on unproven carbon capture technology that will do nothing to improve the environment in our province or our economic situation.

In 2008 Alberta was plunged into a recession, and what was the first thing that this cabinet, this group of people, brought? It was that they thought they should get a 34 per cent pay raise. These are the individuals, Mr. Speaker. That was not smart spending, yet they continue on and want to be the advocates and say these things when everybody sees that they're hypocritical.

Does smart spending include the million-dollar severance packages for retiring MLAs? I'm curious to know. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East asked for pay reviews some time ago. Now, they're finally doing it at this point, but again I'm just very concerned about what the outcome is going to be on that and how it's going to be manipulated. It's disappointing.

4:10

It's clear that this government is looking to run on its record of smart spending. Albertans have a lot to worry about. This Premier and the members of her cabinet are addicted to their old spending habits, and they have no commitments to put an end to their spending ways. We are now preparing to enter the fifth year of deficit budgets as we have seen the size of government grow and the quality of our government services decline. Is this what the Premier is calling sound finances? That's another cliché that she used in the throne speech: sound finances. There's nothing sound about it.

We have watched other countries around the globe go into decline because of this thinking. It's simply mind boggling for this government to suggest otherwise. I will pull that out, I guess, from the speech because it was one of the things I found somewhat concerning that they brought up. It talked about: "While these are trying times, other nations' difficulties do serve to remind us of how fortunate we are to live in . . . Alberta." Why are they trying

times for other nations? It's because of the massive deficits that their governments ran year after year after year, not able to pay it back in trying times. Yet this government, I am quite confident, tomorrow will run into its fifth year of deficit spending.

Perhaps the biggest concern and where the Wildrose differs the most from the others in this House is that we would totally argue – the Leader of the Official Opposition pointed out that the only point he thought was good was this one – that the government has recognized that they have a revenue problem. We believe there is nothing further from the truth. What we have is record revenue, and we're not able to balance the budget with record revenue.

In the last five years we've received \$40 billion plus of resource revenue. That averages over \$8 billion a year, yet they declare that this is too volatile a revenue. The biggest reason it's so volatile is because of the credit crunch that the world hit and the fact that these guys went after them to raise their royalties. So these individuals and companies and entrepreneurs, which they declare they want to attract, left the province for better investment areas. Not a good record.

It's incredible that this government is saying that after a year where they took in record resource revenues, Albertans are not giving enough to the government. They are now suggesting it's time to take more out of the paycheques of Albertans. They are now suggesting that Alberta families are not paying their fair share. It sounds like the results of their budgeting is not working well, especially not for Albertans.

I was also interested to hear that the Premier is planning to increase savings for our heritage fund. We, of course, welcome the move after years of government sucking our funds dry, but I don't think that's what is really the intent of the throne speech, where she talks about that they're going to have a complete review of all of these areas. "This will include reviews of the Alberta heritage savings trust and sustainability funds, capital and infrastructure projects, gaming revenue, our operating budget, and income taxes along with reviews of existing programs." It's interesting that they pontificate that they're going to have results-based budgeting. What has been the result of your past budgeting? It has been a disaster for Albertans.

This government cannot save. Even with record revenues they've failed to save. The last three years all of our funds have been diminishing. To say that they're going to increase savings is comical. How, when they increase spending and they're running a deficit? You can't save when you're running a deficit.

The only strategy this Premier seems to be interested in is contemplating to punish Albertans with higher taxes, declaring loudly that they are providing great services and that they know how to spend Albertans' money better than Albertans do. Everything this government is doing is looking more and more like higher taxes are down the way. The question is: is she going to run record deficits for the next Premier to have to deal with because they refuse to balance the budget? This is the question that many Albertans are concerned with.

Once again, in the throne speech in other areas they talk about property rights. It is insulting to Albertans for this government to suggest that they have been listening to and standing up for landowners with their task force. Unfortunately, this government has claimed that it has been listening for over the past three years, and nothing meaningful has been changed. What was the point in sending out another task force of cabinet members, those who have spoken against Keith Wilson and landowners all across this province, and saying that there is nothing to be concerned about in bills 19, 24, 36, or 50? If, in fact, they were listening, they would repeal these bills. This is just one more concern for Albertans that with this throne speech she is saying: "Trust us. We're going to

listen. But then we'll just reimplement them after an election." Everything has been put on hold for whether it's two months or three months, and then all of a sudden it's going to kick back in and we'll reinstate or say that, yeah, everything is fine, nothing needs to be changed, which is what Albertans have been hearing from the Premier and previous Premier on property rights.

What's the point of continuing to say that they're going to listen to Albertans if the government really isn't going to do anything about it? They had the opportunity last fall. They have the opportunity this spring to do something about it, and that's repeal those bills. These laws have asked landowners to have their land devalued without being fairly compensated and have made it nearly impossible for many to make investments in their land with any confidence. It continues to be a black mark on our province with its impact on business, communities, and democratic rights as free citizens.

The current legislation that is on the table still centralizes power in the hands of cabinet and takes the decision-making process on things like new transmission lines out of the hands of experts, where it really should be. Even worse, it commits all Albertans to higher transmission costs on their power bills. They've failed to act. They've only continued to delay. Albertans need to be reassured before the next election that it won't be full speed ahead on these new transmission lines, and the only way to assure them is to repeal this legislation and return that decision-making to the AUC, the Alberta Utilities Commission.

This government announced that they want to give the health authority council a more active voice. This government doesn't understand that it's not just about giving people a voice, especially when you're deaf. We have seen what happens with health professionals who try to have their voice heard. Dr. Magliocco was bullied out of this province. Again, we have this hypocrisy, declaring they want to attract individuals from around the world. "Your government will attract the world's top talent to Alberta to contribute to a research agenda that will position this province on the international stage."

They haven't attracted top talent, Mr. Speaker; they've driven it out of the province. They speak out and say, "Allow us to practise," and they say, "No, you do it our way, or it's the highway to Florida or to Harvard or some other area" because they're not listening to them. They've chased out our health professionals, and they've chased out many oil and gas entrepreneurs by going after them and wanting to increase their taxes. It's very concerning.

I also find it interesting that this government – again, they love to reiterate and reiterate, over and over again, that they're going to do something when they've done nothing. I found it surprising also to see the government boast about creating a new northern Alberta development strategy.

This Premier seems fixated on strategize and strategy. Yes, well, what have you been doing for the last four years? Why didn't you strategize a little bit? You were all in cabinet. You all had the papers in front of you. You could discuss it, and you failed to strategize it. Mr. Speaker, is that because their tongues and their brains were disconnected until there was a new leadership, and we have a short time period for six months when their tongues are connected to their thinking equipment, and they're allowed to speak out? Then, again, it severed, and now all of a sudden it's one voice, one thought, one way, or the highway. This isn't in the interests of Albertans.

It's interesting, though, this northern development that they talk about. There's already lots of time being spent with that. We have the Radke report. We have Responsible Actions. We have the oil sands secretariat. This government has failed to act on any of

these, Mr. Speaker. So it is clear that this government has no plans to do business in any new way.

The Speech from the Throne showed a government that has no plans to put an end to their out-of-control spending that this government is accustomed to, and we are continuing to fall into a black hole. Worse yet, they are now asking Albertans to pay for their irresponsible spending with the spectre of raising taxes. This government, Mr. Speaker, is addicted to OPM, other peoples' money. They don't know how to handle their own, and now they want to spend Albertans'.

It is my hope that this government will come clear with its tax-and-spend agenda and let all Albertans know what they plan on doing, whether it's balancing the budget or going forward. They say that they're not going to have any cuts, that they're going to have result-based budgeting. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is that when they've looked, they have failed to find anything to cut, and now they're going to go forward and they're going to make other people, other Albertans, pay for their poor budgeting and inability to prioritize correctly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is now available should anyone wish to question or comment on the previous speakers. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, I listened with interest to the member and would be very appreciative of some of his comments about where, in fact, his party would find those economies that would not rely on the instability of a resource revenue and where he would plan to cut the services that we have currently.

Mr. Hinman: That's excellent. Again, we have in the last three years been putting it out. We've asked them to cut the \$2 billion for carbon tax. We've told them . . .

Mr. Liepert: It's not \$2 billion.

Mr. Hinman: Oh – what? – is \$500 million now going to other areas? That's what they've put away and they've put in there.

Their GreenTRIP, again, isn't focused: \$2 billion that isn't focused on real, result-based priorities. It's more on buying votes in different regions. They spent \$300 million to refurbish the MLA buildings. They gave \$300 million – what would I say? – to industry to bring ethanol production when we could have natural gas or propane-powered vehicles that are even cleaner. They have many corporate subsidies that are going out there that we don't need. Perhaps the one area that they forget the most is the bloated, top-heavy management that this province has developed over the years and, again, the plump, superplump money that they pay to their consultants that they bring in and then fire. There are many areas where they could and they should.

I firmly believe that their future expenditures will be an extension of their past expenditures. They're top heavy. They don't focus the money on front-line workers like our teachers, our health care professions. They focus it on management and other areas that are not at this time a priority. They continue to look at opulent buildings. They overbuild buildings. They don't have the staff to even fill them, whether it's the south hospital. They've failed to do a good job on ring roads and acquiring and processing there. Again, the other one is that their accelerated capital spending on infrastructure isn't sustainable.

What we're going to do is that we're going to hit another fall-off to where we're going to devastate industry, because they're not going to continue spending that \$6 billion or \$7 billion and will have to come back to a more sustainable \$4 billion or \$5 billion. We're going to have a major contraction in that industry, which is going to cause a ripple effect that's not good.

There are many areas where they should have, they've failed to, and going forward they're going to continue to fail to. It's interesting. In their result-based financing they say that they're going to start scrutinizing every department. Well, what have they done for the last four years? Again, what their result-based financing has shown is that there are no cuts to be made. The Premier says that there is nothing to cut, there is no waste, yet somehow going forward they're going to manage it.

It's very, very concerning to Albertans that they are spending money foolishly. They're not even prioritizing their infrastructure projects. It's more a political slush fund, where they build different, whether it's a – I won't even get into how they manipulate, but it's very disappointing the way they manipulate the money for infrastructure.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, under 29(2)(a) to continue.

Dr. Swann: Well, the hon. member mentioned corporate subsidies. I'm wondering if he could identify some specific areas where he feels the corporate subsidies are inappropriate, specifically oil companies.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Well, it's interesting. The one that we were quite alarmed with was the \$300 million loan for Precision. They said that that was good because we're getting a good rate of return there. Again, that wasn't the government; it was AIMCo. The biggest one is the subsidies, massive, for carbon sequestration – it's an unproven science – that they're giving to some of the world's biggest companies. They're pushing that ahead. Again, the ethanol one is one where they put out \$300 million. The Alberta investment company, again, is putting money – I can't remember how much went to the company in Vancouver. I've forgotten that one off the top of my head.

There are a number of them, and I'd be happy to share with the member a lot of the corporate subsidies that they continue to push out and say, "Oh, isn't this a wonderful idea. We should be doing the carbon capture," or other various areas, the ethanol that continues.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

If not, we'll proceed with Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by either Red Deer-North or Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and respond to the Lieutenant Governor's speech, which I had read with interest. The Speech from the Throne is supposed to be a road map for the government. It's supposed to be an expression of the government's direction, its plans. It's a look forward into what the government would like to do, and anyone who read that speech or heard it being read would be left wondering where we're going. There are many reviews that are planned. There are many strategies that are going to be made. There are many generalities in this speech about things that I think most everybody would agree on. More support for postsecondary education, strengthening the health system, and protecting the environment are all things we can all agree on. What you would

expect from a throne speech, Mr. Speaker, is, in fact, something with some more specifics, more meat on the bones, if you will, and we did not see that in this speech.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a wonderful place to live. It's a wonderful place to do business, to raise a family, and it deserves a plan and a government that's worthy of the people who live here. It's a province whose foundation of its economy is energy, yet there's scarce here that would indicate where we're going to go in terms of the energy industries in our province. The oil sands are a critical part of our economy and our economic future, not just for this province but for the country as well, but there's no clear outline of what's involved in the Premier's national energy strategy.

I think a national energy strategy is in principle a good thing, particularly if it's led by Alberta and not by Ottawa. A strategy has certain things, Mr. Speaker. It has plans, rationalizations for the plans. It has objectives. A national energy strategy should talk about how we're going to enjoy energy self-sufficiency in the country, how we're going to diversify our energy industry, how we're going to build renewable energy, how we're going to use natural gas, how we're going to make sure that we have affordable energy that has a minimum impact on the environment, all of those things you would expect in a strategy. But like the Prime Minister – and I don't really have much else in common with him – I am confused about what this Premier means by a national energy strategy. That's because at this stage it seems little more than a ploy to convince other provinces, specifically British Columbia, to support pipelines. That's not a national energy strategy; that is a camouflage for a specific economic objective.

I think the Speech from the Throne, had it been written by an NDP government, would have talked about the role of natural gas, would have talked about electricity, would have talked about self-sufficiency for the country as a whole, would have talked about future development of jobs, and would have talked about protecting the environment. It would have included all of those things, but this PC government doesn't seem to think that those things are important.

Mr. Speaker, the oil sands are not only critical to our country's economy, but they are becoming increasingly an international target, and there are real risks to our ability to continue to develop them. Most of those risks are things that the NDP has been warning the government about for years: that it is time to take international concern about the environment, including the tailings ponds and downstream water pollution and emissions, seriously. The government has so far refused to do that. The government prefers to spend a few million dollars on advertising campaigns in the United States, trying to paper over the very real environmental problems that we have failed to address. So I think that that's the first place to start.

4:30

Now, we have been pressing, environmental groups have been pressing, and scientists have been pressing for meaningful water quality monitoring. Finally the government has admitted that for years it lied to Albertans about the state of water quality monitoring in the oil sands, and they've put in place something that might actually do the job. But let's not forget the history. This government denied this for years and years and years, and it took pressure from citizens, it took pressure from the NDP, from the labour movement, from environmental organizations to force them to finally admit the truth.

Mr. Speaker, bitumen is a key resource. Unlike the previous Premier, who promised four or five years ago to eliminate or reduce the export of unprocessed bitumen to the United States as well as all of the jobs and investment that went down the pipeline with it, the government has never done so and is now openly supporting two pipeline projects that would export unprocessed bitumen and create jobs in Texas and in China.

Mr. Speaker, let's not forget there were a number of major upgrading plants approved for the heartland area that were going ahead, billion-dollar projects that would have created jobs and drawn investment to our province, that have been shelved or even cancelled because it's cheaper for the oil companies to pipe bitumen down the Keystone pipeline and renovate existing old refineries on the Gulf coast. We have lost that investment, we have lost those jobs, we've lost that value-added because this government has refused to act to protect the jobs of us and our children and our grandchildren. This government doesn't care about jobs from the energy industry. They care about profits for the energy industry.

Mr. Speaker, also, I want to address the question of electricity because this is a serious problem. It's been broken since 1995, and now the chickens are coming home to roost for this government. There is incredible instability in the price of electricity in this province. It's affecting businesses, it's affecting farms, it's affecting the public sector, and it's affecting homeowners. Power prices now are the highest they have ever been. They are double – at least, my own bill is double what it was just 12 months ago, and the government has no plan. Deregulation is the problem. Deregulation broke the system, and unless we regulate prices in the electricity market, no amount of market reform as proposed by some other parties is going to fix the problem.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a problem with its finances, and we are now in a third consecutive deficit. We'll see tomorrow whether it's going to be four or not. But the question is: where did this deficit come from when we are the richest province in the country? We have access to revenue sources that no one else has, yet we're in a deficit.

Well, I remember when Stockwell Day, the Progressive Conservative Treasurer, introduced the flat tax. Now, that primarily benefited people with the highest incomes in this province, people over \$200,000 a year. They had the biggest savings on their taxes. It cost the province billions of dollars. Then when Steve West was the Progressive Conservative finance minister of this province, he announced that they were going to cut the corporate tax – and this is on profitable corporations – from 16 per cent down to 8 per cent. They have sequentially reduced rates. It's now around 10 per cent. It's about a 60 per cent cut in corporate taxes. That cost the treasury billions and billions of dollars. And, of course, they backed away on royalties with the very modest changes that were brought in under the previous Premier.

They have created a massive loss of revenue, all directed at the wealthiest in our province, all directed at the most profitable corporations. That's who they benefited. That's who they gave the massive handouts to. Now we don't have enough money for our seniors' housing. We don't have enough money for education. We don't have enough money for our health care system, and front-line staff are bearing the brunt.

Now the government is going to look for other places to privatize. The Premier has promised in her campaign to become leader of the Progressive Conservative Party that in the first six months they would look in every area of government with a view to finding things that could be privatized. Now we have introduced Bill 1, which is zero-based budgeting, and zero-based

budgeting is, in fact, a key implementation method for privatization and contracting out.

With respect to health the government is still going down the wrong path when it comes to long-term care. It is still looking for private-public partnerships, which involve subsidizations of the private sector and do not protect our seniors from being gouged and being squeezed in order to receive the care they need. I recently spoke with a large number of front-line health care workers in private nursing homes, and the conditions have not improved. The staff shortages are severe, and the patients, the seniors who live there, are given completely inadequate care. Mr. Speaker, what's going on in our seniors' homes in this province is a disgrace.

This government's approach of private delivery will not solve the problem. Of course, the lack of long-term care means that people are put by their doctors into acute-care beds, and then they're not available when they're needed by emergency room patients, so everything backs up out of the emergency room into the waiting room. Mr. Speaker, Albertans have had enough of health care delivered in waiting rooms. They want to have first-rate health facilities. They want them publicly delivered, not just publicly funded. This government plays games with words, and what they mean is using public, taxpayers' money to subsidize their private-industry friends.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to education, having met with a number of school boards, it's very clear that unstable funding is a serious problem. Even though the government negotiated a long-term deal with teachers a few years ago, it did not provide sufficient funds for the school boards to pay for that. Particularly, there were no additional funds for the other people who work in education who are not teachers and expect the same kinds of increases.

Mr. Speaker, the government's commitment to accessibility is belied by the high tuition fees at our universities, high fees at colleges and technical institutions, and by allowing postsecondary institutions to charge noninstructional fees, which are just a fraud to get around the tuition fee cap. Of course, the instructional fees that are charged in our primary and secondary schools are very, very damaging to the accessibility that should be for everyone in our educational system.

Mr. Speaker, the government talks in the throne speech about working closely and openly with the federal government. While this government would like to pretend to be progressive when it's speaking to progressively minded voters, it is, in fact, deeply wedded to a very, very conservative federal government. I have asked the Premier in question periods previously about the government's position relative to Kyoto. The withdrawal of Canada from Kyoto, supported by the government of Alberta, is a disgrace. The crime bill will put thousands and thousands of Albertans in jail unnecessarily and produce massive costs – massive costs – to the provincial government. Both Ontario and Quebec have refused to pay those costs.

4:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was quite interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood with regard to the recent spike in the cost of electricity, which I understand was caused by some unscheduled shutdowns.

I guess I would like to ask the hon. member if he tracks his electricity costs on an annual basis. For instance, I recently looked at my annual electricity costs for the last 12 years. I noticed that in

2002 and 2003 they were quite high, but they've continually gone down, and they're slowly rising. Until this past year they were still several hundred dollars less than they were back in 2002 and 2003.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the problems with the system is extremely unstable electricity prices, but as for the member's suggestion that they are slowly rising when they've set a brand new record for the highest prices in Alberta history, that is not rising slowly.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also address a question of whether or not this provincial government is going to support the decision of the federal government with respect to pensions and taking away the social security.

In terms of the environment this government has made cut after cut after cut to enforcement. In terms of culture they have made cut after cut. It's clear, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, that this government has not got a record of supporting either the environment or supporting arts. It's not planning the economy for the future of the province. It's not building a future economy. It's not protecting our social services, particularly health care and education. I don't believe that the House should be supporting a Speech from the Throne that is not only vague but which simply is a precursor to the repetition of the same mistakes, errors, and bad judgment that have dogged this government's decision-making for the past 10 or 15 years.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, just a follow-up. Yes, perhaps the price of electricity has reached a record high in the last month due to the spikes that I've mentioned, but similarly strawberries occasionally reach record highs. Gasoline goes up and down. Everything is volatile in price situations, so I really don't see the relevance of the comment that for one month it was that high.

The Speaker: The hon. member, if you wish.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, strawberries, while very nice, are not an essential service; electricity is. I believe we need an electricity system where we have regular, clear prices, where you don't have to go and sign up on some contract that's going to get you into trouble down the road, where you don't have to learn how to hedge. You just pay a minimum bill that covers the cost of the generation and a guaranteed rate of return. You turn on the lights, you have reliable energy, and you don't have monthly surprises on your power bill.

What we've got in this province is an electricity system that is completely broken, and the hon. member has not addressed the question of manipulation of power prices by power companies. TransAlta was recently caught selling electricity into the B.C. market while there was a shortage in Alberta, causing a spike in prices, and they profited as well as all of the other power companies profited. They were caught, but the other power companies made a lot of extra money, millions of dollars. They didn't have to pay that back. It comes out of the pockets of consumers.

As for these temporary outages, who knows if those things were unavoidable? What I do know is that many of the coal-fired power plants are now reaching the end of their lives, and there is no new generation that is being brought on in order to accommodate. That will create chronic structural shortages in electricity. If you think prices are high now, just wait until that happens.

The Speaker: Additional questions or participants?

Then I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I anticipated your call. Yesterday's Speech from the Throne was the most drearily disappointing of my seven years and counting in the Alberta Legislature as the twice-elected representative for Calgary-Varsity. Presumably, it was penned to reflect the priorities of the most recently selected leader of the Progressive Conservative governing party of Alberta, whose currently untested personal popularity outstrips that of her long-governing party. Rather than looking ahead, the speech looked nostalgically back through the rear-view mirror at the long-since-departed glory days of a brand new government under the energetic, innovative leadership of Peter Lougheed.

A failed attempt was made to equate those early, popularly supported, just-out-of-the-chute halcyon days of Tory governance of this province to our current provincial situation, 41 long years later. While our newly selected Premier shares some of the qualities that made Peter electorally attractive to Albertans, including, "relatively speaking," youthfulness, a postsecondary education, and a personal drive, Peter Lougheed literally and figuratively quarterbacked a team that was new to the field and was anxious to prove after 38 years of Social Credit rule that they had the energy and desire to reflect what was in the best interests of Albertans.

Despite the best intentions and the majority of yet-to-be-fulfilled campaign promises that initially attracted a sufficient number of Albertans to allow our recently selected Premier to narrowly defeat the Tory establishment old boys' choice, the porridge or gruel that is attempting to reinvent itself has sat on the shelf for 41 years. No amount of sugar or added spices is going to make the lumps go down more easily. Despite the best attempts of the royal writers of the Public Affairs Bureau to raise our yet to be battle-tested, forged-in-election-fires Premier to the level of saint or ancient mythological hero status, she remains a mere mortal with Herculean baggage to carry. Atlas, by comparison, had it easy.

While some of the older boys and girls, myself included, will soon be taking our final political bows, a significant number of the government players remain the same. The stage and the backdrops that Peter Lougheed once built, like our schools and hospitals, are suffering from age and neglect. A sense of entitlement has replaced the desire to serve in the public's best interest. That the me's are crying out more loudly than the we's can be seen in the obscene raises the former Premier and the current Premier as the then Minister of Justice awarded themselves.

Although token lip service was paid in the throne speech to the educational needs of our First Nations and Métis children, half of which fail to complete high school in three years, if ever, no clear plans were offered to suggest how improvements in educational engagement would occur. Nonrenewable resource rich but governance poor Alberta has among the highest high school dropout rates in Canada. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Alberta has the lowest postsecondary participation rate in our country. Although the 2003 Learning Commission recommended funding full-day optional kindergarten and half-day optional junior kindergarten, this throne speech nine years later failed to commit this government to either early intervention or education. This government continues to place greater emphasis on nonrenewable resources than it does on education or innovation. Regardless of the problem or question education is the answer.

Our most important resources are people. This government's record of supporting and protecting Alberta's most vulnerable, including children, the disabled, and seniors, is shameful. In the past 10 years 60 children have been killed while in government

care, with hundreds more injured. The majority of these children were First Nations. While finally permitting the Alberta children's advocate to report directly to the Assembly is a small but welcome first step, it in itself won't keep children safe.

Alberta has the highest rate of domestic abuse in Canada. Twice as many women are turned away from shelters than provided even temporary housing.

The province's record in protecting seniors and the disabled, like that of children in its care, is far from exemplary. In 2004 Jennie Nelson, a senior in long-term care, was scalded to death. In 2005 Auditor General Fred Dunn wrote a scathing report on the conditions in long-term care centres throughout Alberta. Eight years later a significant number of Dunn's recommendations have not been implemented. In 2006 the judge-led fatality inquiry into Jennie Nelson's scalding death recommended that, at a bare minimum, antiscalding devices should be installed in all care facilities.

Had the government acted on the recommendations, 35-year-old David Holmes would still be alive today. David, who had previously been burned within this facility, was forced to wait for over two and a half hours before emergency services was contacted. One thousand care facilities are still waiting for antiscalding devices to be finally installed.

4:50

No mention was made in the throne speech of either providing the training or a decent wage for front-line caregivers and contracted agencies where high staff turnover compromises care of our most vulnerable. In the throne speech no mention was made that would contradict the Premier's campaign commitment to lift the cap on long-term care residence fees, which effectively turns vulnerable seniors into commodities, sold to the lowest private, for-profit building bidder.

Also absent from the throne speech was the commitment that our current selected Premier, then a leadership candidate, made to hold a public inquiry into health care. Without this inquiry medical service providers will not be protected by whistle-blower legislation and will therefore be prevented from effectively advocating both for themselves or their patients.

The throne speech was more notable for what it didn't contain than what it did. No reference was made to a fixed election date, which contradicts another of the Premier's "fingers firmly crossed" election promises. While winks and nods have been exchanged about the possibility of raising monthly AISH payments by \$400 and clawbacks of \$400 for those able to work, no commitment has yet been made.

As part of the nostalgia flashback the importance of agriculture was reaffirmed. Reference was made to Stephen Harper's recent dissolution of the Canadian Wheat Board as though this was something the majority of western farmers in general and Alberta farmers in particular supported, which is not the case. Heavy-handed governance which disregards individual rights is becoming a common theme of both our federal and provincial governments. Although the practice of agriculture was celebrated in the throne speech, the same cannot be said for recognizing the importance of paid farm workers in Alberta, who continue to be denied workers' compensation or protection through Occupational Health and Safety.

The emphasis placed in this throne speech was on resource extraction rather than on sustainability. Simply adding on water as part of the environment ministry's title is meaningless without conservation action, which has been notably absent in Alberta until, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre noted, the province was dragged kicking and screaming by the federal government to at least meet its minimal standards.

Finally the peer-reviewed, science-based studies of Dr. David Schindler have been accepted. Whether his recommendations are implemented in an effective and timely manner was not confirmed within the throne speech. Water and well-being, whether of plants, animals, or human beings, go hand in hand. However, water continues to play second fiddle to extraction, whether renewable or nonrenewable.

The province has yet to chart the location and capacity of our aquifers. Sustainable Resource Development, which is an oxymoron in Alberta, permits clear-cutting, euphemistically referred to as block-cutting, in our primary eastern slopes watershed. Fence posts and stumps trump water, species, and noninvasive recreational opportunities. Special place designation in the Castle means nothing as the government has permitted Spray Lakes to cumulatively clear-cut one-half of the forested areas of the Castle-Crown, which was once actually protected by the federal government as part of Waterton national park.

SRD has used a variety of excuses to attempt to justify the unjustifiable. Previously the excuse for nonsustainable clear-cutting was to prevent the spread of pine beetles. Now that the beetle threat has been reduced in both the Castle and Bragg Creek, the new excuse is fire suppression. Rather than selective logging or controlled burns, which have proven effective, clear-cut logging causes many more problems than it solves, including erosion, habitat loss, summer and fall season dry tinder, droughts, and spring flooding.

The Alberta Conservative Party has by its actions or lack thereof lost the right to attach the term "progressive" to its title. If Albertans take the opportunity to compare the throne speech to the recently released Liberal policy documents, they will be able to judge which party or parties are truly progressive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Additional speakers?

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 Results-based Budgeting Act

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and President of the Treasury Board and Enterprise on behalf of the hon. Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 1, the Results-based Budgeting Act, and to have the opportunity to spend a few minutes to talk about the bill.

It will also be my pleasure as President of the Treasury Board, Mr. Speaker, to help lead the review of programs and services and results-based budgeting that are prescribed by this legislation, hopefully, once it's passed. This legislation is about Albertans identifying the outcomes they want their government to achieve in priority areas that they have identified. It's about ensuring that we are delivering the right services in the right way and at the right time to deliver the outcomes that Albertans are asking us to deliver, and it's about achieving a new level of fiscal discipline where funds will be allocated only where they are shown to

improve the lives of Albertans. As our Premier has said, it is about delivering services better and smarter.

Over the last several months we've been speaking with Albertans. The Finance minister and I convened a series of roundtable discussions, an online survey which received thousands of responses, and we received written submissions on the budget. The Minister of Education led consultations on the Education Act. In fact, the Premier and I and a few other of my colleagues listened to Albertans from one corner of this province to the other over the summer during our leadership race.

Albertans have clearly told us that they want the government to deliver results in a number of priority areas: health care, education, growing our economy, providing supports for seniors and vulnerable Albertans, and investing in our communities. Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what Bill 1 proposes to do. Through consultation and review this government intends to align its programs and services to the outcomes that Albertans expect their government to pursue.

Hon. members during question period alluded in their comments to: well, why haven't they been doing this over the last four years? This will be a framework where Albertans will be able to tell their government, "This is the priority that we have," and either we're delivering it appropriately or we're not, and this is what we need to do. Through this bill that framework will be there to ensure that Albertans have that opportunity. Once the desired outcomes are established, the Treasury Board will provide for a review process that will ensure that the programs and services being delivered by the government of Alberta are actually contributing to the outcomes that Albertans have asked us to deliver.

In the private sector, thanks to market forces, in order for a company to survive, it has to be able to adapt and continually adjust its offerings to ensure that it's offering a product that its customers value. If a company's product is not aligned with the expectations of its clients, that business will quickly find itself struggling to remain afloat. Therefore, like any private business would, it's important to ensure that the programs and services offered by the government of Alberta are relevant to today's Albertans.

Too often in the past we've allowed programs and services to continue to exist in one manner for the simple reason that they've always existed. This has led to some government programs and services remaining static despite significant evolutions in the clientele that they serve. If through the course of a review we find a program that is no longer effective in achieving the desired outcome, resources from that program or service should be reallocated to another program or service that will contribute to the achievement of the desired outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, I know that critics of this legislation have suggested that this is an effort that's all about outsourcing programs, cutting social programs, and eliminating government jobs. As usual, the truth of the matter is the exact opposite. In reviewing this legislation, I see great synergy between program and service reviews and the Premier's mandate to me to lead a public service renewal.

Albertans are blessed to be served by a passionate and dedicated group of public servants. Mr. Speaker, in talking to members of our public service both last summer and during our cabinet tours, one thing has become crystal clear, and that is that public servants want to be contributing to programs that are effective in achieving outcomes and improving the quality of life for all Albertans. Public servants in Alberta are proud, and so they should be, of the job that they do every day in assisting vulnerable Albertans, keeping our highways safe, educating our children, or assisting a

small business that's just starting to grow. Mr. Speaker, through program review we will enable the public service to better connect to the needs of Albertans. Our front-line staff will be an invaluable resource as we go through this process.

5:00

We will also be bringing in outside experts to ensure that as reviews are being done, they are being done correctly. This will not be just a case of navel-gazing but a robust review that is challenged and validated by Albertans and third-party experts. In my opinion, this is one of the most valuable and unique aspects of this legislation. Too often previous attempts at program review became fragmented and limited in scope and, therefore, limited in result. Only a comprehensive approach can lead to transformational change.

Given the sheer magnitude of the programs and services this government delivers, this is not going to be an easy undertaking. To do it right, we will need to take the time to do it carefully, thoughtfully, and thoroughly. Careful consideration needs to be given to the timing of each review, and consideration needs to be given to ensuring that after each review the necessary and appropriate changes are made and implemented to align the program or service to the desired outcome. Approximately one-third of the government programs will be reviewed each year for the next three years. Once a program review is completed, we'll build a budget for that program from the ground up, investing funds as businesses do, only on those programs that deliver the results we want.

Some might ask: is that the best way to demonstrate fiscal restraint? To those I say: yes. It's important that the government treat taxpayer dollars with the same respect and consideration that Albertans do. Albertans apply a great deal of due diligence in determining how to spend their hard-earned money, and it's incumbent upon the government of Alberta to exercise a similar level of consideration.

Through this legislation, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that every dollar we invest on behalf of Albertans is invested in programming and services that are contributing to the expectations that Albertans have. This legislation will clearly link our budget and policy decisions to the outcomes that we want to achieve, the outcomes that Albertans have identified.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This may come as a surprise, but I really hope results-based budgeting works because the results of the budgets that we previously have received have not worked. There has been a push and a pull, the lean years versus the so-called fat years. As previously mentioned by another responder to the throne speech, Premiers have used the funds as their own personal cache, c-a-c-h-e as well as c-a-s-h, Ralph bucks being an example.

This government has previously failed in creating the types of efficiencies it's proposing to create now. For example, there was an organization referred to with the acronym RAGE, restructuring and government efficiency. You may not remember that ministry as, thankfully, it was very short lived. RAGE and results restructuring: there's a scary familiarity to those terms.

This government on a regular basis, at least for the seven years and counting, as I mentioned, that I've been involved, has frequently resorted to sup supply to bail itself out, and sup supply has frequently been in the \$1 billion to \$2 billion range. That's obviously not been results-based budgeting, where you have this

line of credit that you can dip into or you can go to the taxpayer bailed-out branch of the bank – what's our credit union here in Alberta? – the ATB, to bail it out or to provide loans. Now, I don't believe in feast and famine, and therefore I am hopeful that a more results-based approach is going to prove the charm.

We had a very strong Auditor General in the form of Fred Dunn. In his accounting Fred had pointed out a number of the shortcomings in various ministries and departments, and through his recommendations, had they been adopted, we could have literally saved billions of dollars. For example, Fred pointed out the inappropriate nature of tracking our resource revenues, our royalties. He pointed out that because there is a single individual at the switch doing the accounting, there was the potential of a billion dollars of resource revenue being left on the table. He also had concerns about the fact that industry supplied all the information from which the royalty rates were then assessed. That certainly wasn't a results-based practice.

When the government talks about either zero-based budgeting or results-based budgeting, I can't help but think of the analogy of someone who's suddenly found religion. Possibly it's someone who was addicted to smoking, and now they lecture all the friends they used to hang out with in front of the hospital or the bar about the evil weed. The proof, of course, Mr. Speaker, will be in the pudding. I won't be around to taste that pudding, in terms of being around in the Legislature, but my family, my grandchildren, that I'm looking forward to spending time with in the very near future, will be affected by this new budgeting approach.

The hon. Minister of Education is chewing and chuckling. But he also, I think, is concerned because he has family members, and I'm sure he wishes them well. He's in charge of a ministry currently that has a significant number, hundreds of thousands, of students whose futures depend on stable funding, which, hopefully, this resource-based budgeting, Bill 1, will provide.

Mr. Speaker, having been a member of the opposition for the past seven years tends to put a person into the doubting Thomas category of disciples. Yet this is one area where I would wish the government success, just as I would have liked to have seen the successful completion and implementation of the land-use framework. The budget is the key underlying factor that determines the well-being of individuals. We need to have a strong economy, but we need to have one that is sustainable. For far too long this government has been reliant on globally set, nonrenewable commodity prices. Possibly with this results-based budgeting they will be able to recognize the importance of having stable sources of funding.

Now, we've talked in our Liberal campaign policy of the need for a return to at least some form of progressive tax structure. We've pointed out that we believe that people who earn over \$100,000 should have their tax rate upped to 12 per cent. We've pointed out that people who earn between \$100,000 and \$250,000 should have their tax rate upped by approximately 5 per cent, and we'd like to see the equivalent of a 7 per cent increase in those earning over \$250,000. Taxes, while they are considered by most individuals to be painful, are the only way of guaranteeing that programs, education, health care, social assistance can be sustainably funded.

Alberta has for far too long taken for granted our resource riches. We have benefited in the good years from the price of a barrel of oil. We've benefited previously from our gas prices though right now, with the speed to get everything out of the ground, fracked or otherwise, we've pushed down the value of the gas market. There seems to be this hell-bent desire to get every

piece of bitumen out of the oil sands and shipped out of this country for refining as fast as possible.

5:10

What's the result? If the Keystone goes forward, if the Gateway goes forward, we'll be then, not in the case of China but in the case of the States, bringing back the refined product, as has been the case down in Chicago. We give them our raw product, and they refine it and sell it back to us at a considerably higher price. Hopefully, with this results-based Bill 1 proposal we'll start looking at actually doing what the hon. Deputy Premier suggested. He suggested that we should not be exporting beef on the hoof, but we should be exporting beef in the box. Likewise, we should be exporting finished products rather than raw products.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, I have concerns about Canada's relationship with the EU and the various trading agreements that are being formed. I am concerned that water may find itself as a commodity on an international market. I'm afraid that we may not have the protection, the sovereignty over our own resources. I don't see, because of the thinness of Bill 1, how those results of losing a significant portion of our sovereignty or our economy can be prevented in results-based budgeting.

Mr. Speaker, I am planning to tread this stage, at least the Alberta stage, for some time longer, and I want to enjoy with my grandchildren the fruits of our combined labours. If the government, as I say, has finally found results-based religion and it allows us to sustainably move from one year's budget to the next and the next without continually being bailed out either by the sustainability fund or drawing the heritage fund down to zero, then it's going to be a great success.

Mr. Speaker, as is the case with your retirement, I wish this government well.

The Speaker: Anybody else? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak to Bill 1, the Results-based Budgeting Act. I was looking over this act. It doesn't take that particularly long to read. It's two pages long. Essentially, the long and short of it is that we will review government programs and see whether they're doing the job that they were supposed to do. Although the Deputy Premier stole my punchline, it does beg the comment that if we weren't doing that already, that's been a bit of a problem. Okay?

The way I look at this act, results-based budgeting: sure, it seems like something that should have been happening all along. Whether it actually does anything or not, well, I'm not so sure. I know the devil in the detail will be results-based budgeting. I'm sure you go through it and say: well, how many people are on AISH? Do people need to be on AISH? Well, obviously, the answer is yes. How much of this – do you start building budgets from scratch again and reviewing them? Well, I'm not so sure about that. It seems to be one of those exercises in trying to look like you're doing something without actually doing something. I'll get back to my first point. If it wasn't actually being done in the first place, it begs the question: why the heck wasn't it being done in the first place?

You have sort of, at least with me, a circle as to where in fact this is going and what in fact it's doing. But, I guess, on a positive note, if it does provide some clarity to what I can say have been the ups and downs in our budgeting process, the ups and downs in the nature of our spending habits in good times and bad times, and the unpredictability of funding in our public services, well, then that is a good thing. If that allows us to get on a basis where we recognize the purposes of predictable and sustainable funding as

well as predictable and sustainable revenue sources, I believe that this act will possibly have some good measure.

If we look at this act coupled with some of the rhetoric that came out of the throne speech and looking back at the history of this great province, we are living in an economy that has times of very high revenue and times of very low revenue. This may in fact make it more challenging for governments to react. They're submitted to public pressure from time to time. When the coffers are full, spend more; when the coffers are down, well, spend less. In terms of actually running a society for the long run, doing things in this manner may in fact be in inverse relationship to each other. They should actually be done at the opposite ends. When the economy is down, that's when you need a little more funding. When the economy is up, that's probably when you need a little less. That's what Keynesian economics is, what you have to do to provide your citizens with decent services at all times throughout the existence of that society.

Like I mentioned earlier in my member's statement, unless you're going to totally dismiss the role of government, there is a place for hospitals, a place for schools, a place for teachers, a place for nurses, a place for police officers and those essential services that need to be provided in a society that maintains some sort of decency, maintains some sort of structure, and maintains some sort of organization. These services, in good times and bad, will cost money. Whether they're costs or simply investments in a civil society, well, those can be debated, but I think, in the main, they're costs of a civil society, of a reasonable approach to organizing and structuring the way Alberta moves ahead and goes forward.

On that note, I hope that, coupled with the Results-based Budgeting Act, we are looking at a results-based budgeting approach that allows for both predictable and sustainable funding as well as saving for the future. If you look at how we have run our oil and gas resources, since 1985 we have spent approximately 200-plus billion dollars in petroleum resources on what I would call average public services. If you look at it, our health care system is performing at around the seventh best of all the provinces. We have the fewest university spaces per capita, we have some of the fewest police officers on the streets, we have a low graduating rate from high school, and the list goes on and on. A strong argument can be made that our public services have not benefited from this great wealth we have brought into the provincial coffers.

If you look at things that have contributed to that, well, no doubt the introduction of the flat tax has obviously robbed the public purse of some benefit. I think estimates are that it could have raised \$2 billion to \$3 billion more since 2000. In the main, that could have gone into the heritage trust fund and supported other options. I hope we're looking seriously at getting rid of the flat tax system. In any system that believes in equality of opportunity, there have to be contributions from the taxpayer. Even economists like Adam Smith, who are generally looked at as so-called right-wing economists that recognize the market, also recognize the fact that those who have done better in a society owe a greater share to the public purse.

5:20

That is shared by virtually all economists and, in fact, leads to a sense of equality of opportunity. Whether you're a rich person or a poor person, you're going to get an opportunity to build your life and compete. Simply put, those things that need to be funded are public education and public health care to ensure that equality of opportunity exists. To ensure that that exists, there has to be predictable and sustainable funding, and to get predictable and

sustainable funding, you need some measure of contribution from your society. So it's all rolled up into one.

If this Results-based Budgeting Act looks at both the revenue side as well as the expenditure side, I am hopeful that this, too, may bring a new morning to Alberta, to use a phrase from Ronald Reagan, who probably would have been very happy with results-based budgeting. I always liked that election slogan. Let's hope that results-based budgeting will provide some of these things.

Hopefully, in the budget tomorrow we will hear of the Premier's plan on how to raise revenue, and I will applaud her tomorrow if that happens as I believe that now is the time to have the discussion. I think Albertans are open to seeing what that would look like. In my view, it would probably do this government no harm, and it would probably do the people of Alberta in the long run a lot of good.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. I know you will have many tributes here over the course of the next little while, but I, too, would like to say that I've enjoyed being under your tutelage in this House and under your guise. It has been fun, and I thank you for your service to this great province. I'll probably say that again from time to time, so don't let it go to your head. There we go.

The Speaker: You're very kind, but you cannot escape the responsibility of Standing Order 29(2)(a), which is now all available to all members.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Swann: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was inspired by my colleague's comments. I guess one of the areas that I see most vulnerable in results-based budgeting is one he alluded to, certainly, the people with chronic disability, who at the present time are required to do an inordinate amount of reassessment, re-evaluation, form-filling, sometimes delays in it being approved. That's one aspect of what results-based management can cause, undue suffering and uncertainty and in some cases delays in their very benefits.

The other area that seems to me to be very vulnerable is: how do we measure prevention? How do we measure the fact that as a result of what we've been doing, people did not end up in emergency departments, did not end up in criminal activity, did not end up as addicts, did not end up draining other aspects of services because they were getting results but that those results happened to be unmeasurable by our current form of measuring? Does this mean that there's a real danger to some of those areas where we fundamentally know that over a decade perhaps we are going to see declines in the need for human services – for counselling, for addiction services – but they will not be measured in this particular format within one year of actually changing something or leaving it the same?

Two uncertainties there that I hope the hon. member can comment on.

The Speaker: If you wish, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, just speaking from personal experience as a person with a disability, when I had my disability, I was 21. I had graduated from high school, was going to university, was playing hockey, but I know darn well that during that first year to two after I'd become disabled, the form-filling, the organization, the trying to get on to various government services programs would have been difficult for me if not darn near impossible going through the trauma that I'd just been through. I recognize that there are many people in our society who are overwhelmed by that process. Okay? You see it quite a bit in my office in Calgary-

Buffalo, where you have some of our marginalized citizens who are having difficulty getting through the minefield of social services or Alberta Works or the like. You see that quite a bit. You see people whom you're not quite sure how this happened to and whether something could be done.

I think you see that in AISH, too. One of my concerns with AISH, if we're going to increase the benefits, is: is this government just not going to then recognize the people who are supposed to actually be able to get on the program? I'm hoping that that doesn't happen.

But you're correct. In any budgeting process governments can limit who gets on a program, who receives the benefit, and the like. I'm not so sure whether results-based budgeting will add to that or not, so I don't know if I can comment fully on it.

The second part of your question was on . . .

Dr. Swann: Prevention.

Mr. Hehr: Prevention. Well, in any government you look at, I think you'll see some of the language changing out there. You saw that in the report by Vibrant Communities Calgary yesterday. They're trying to lead governments into looking at some of that harm reduction capacity and that social justice capacity and what actually costs the system and/or, I believe, in the nonprofit world the amount of sort of vibrancy you're creating with a program, not necessarily as a cost.

I think that mindset has almost come about in the last five or six years out of some of those communities. I actually was hopeful that I saw some of that language come out in the throne speech. I'm hoping there is along that side of the House some identity that costs are actually sometimes investments and the like. I'm optimistic that this bill may actually do that. I think it's more window dressing than anything. I think government departments should have been doing this all along, but if it creates a little bit of focus, well, that can't be a bad thing.

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

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure to speak relative to this Bill 1. When I first read the bill, I must admit I read it in astonishment. The first question that, in fact, people in my community were asking me was: "Well, what have they been doing for the last couple of years? Haven't they been doing this?" I find it very interesting because I think it's a very good question that Albertans have been asking. What have you been doing? I pause for a moment, and I ask everyone to reflect on: what has this government been doing if they haven't been doing zero-based budgeting, result-based budgeting?

It is my understanding, in fact, that that is what is supposed to have been going on as a, quote, unquote, Conservative government. [interjections] I'm glad to see the front bench has finally woken up.

That being the case, I find it really quite amazing that Bill 1 is something that they basically are admitting they have never done before. That is what is amazing to me: to be considered a Conservative government, but it's like it's something new. I heard the Treasury Board president just the other day talking about the Speech from the Throne as if this is just something totally new, that this is like a new idea, that it's like a newborn child, that we've got to protect it and give it a chance. In reality, Albertans are looking in astonishment: well, what has this government been doing?

Most governments in Canada, in fact, are doing this right now. Here this government is – I'm glad to see the Government House

Leader is listening intently, unlike the Minister of Education. Perhaps he could learn to be a good listener rather than yapping. Okay?

I would like to say that most governments in Canada, including our federal government, already do this. The question is that the Alberta Conservative government is now making it sound like it's a new idea.

5:30

Now, for someone who has taught for nine, 10 years in a postsecondary institution, I have found this really quite remarkable that finally this government, it appears, is getting with the 21st century even though governments and organizations and families have been doing this for years. The question I have to ask is simply this. Have ministers not been following what has been going on in this direction? I have from the Treasury Board president the fact that he's indicated that we've been doing reviews and program reviews, so this is a contradiction in terms. It's a contradiction in terms because I sat on Treasury Board, and in actual fact during that time . . . [interjection] I'm glad to see the Minister of Education is finally paying attention. That's good as a student to pay attention because he can learn something here.

This, quite simply, is about the fact . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has the floor, and I'm quite enjoying this debate this afternoon, so I wish all would speak through me so that I could be right up to date.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To reiterate, under zero-based budgeting, something that governments have been employing for years – by the way, I want to share through the chair to the government that municipalities have been doing results-based budgeting. They've been doing zero-based budgeting for years, and finally the President of the Treasury Board, is making it sound, with the Premier, like this is something new. This is nothing new. This is what Alberta families have been practising. They have been living within their means. They don't spend more than they take in. For the government to make it sound in the Speech from the Throne that this is under Bill 1, the Results-based Budgeting Act, of the Premier, let me share with you the fact that many members in here I know have of course practised in both secondary and in an educational field in postsecondary, that this is something that has been taught years ago.

One really has to ask the question: were ministers of the Crown not following what was, in fact, something that was in place for years? I am trying to understand. To the Minister of Finance: I am trying to understand why they have not been following what is proposed by the Premier to be the new Bill 1, because if that is the case, then I think every minister perhaps should give back their salary for failure to do their job pertaining to results based on how much you take in and how much you take out. For the life of me, Bill 1 strikes me as more of almost: is this Halloween? Because it can't be true that you actually are suggesting that this is a new idea. It is not a new idea.

When I ran for mayor of Fort McMurray in 1992, we were talking about results-based decision-making and budgeting. Fast-forward now 20 years later, and here the government, a conservative government, is now for the first time making it look like no minister ever knew about it. I have to really begin to ask the question. Since I sat on Treasury Board, I heard it in the past. It was my assumption that ministers who sat on Treasury Board

were actually doing their job. Now it's very clear that they were not doing their job because that was the clear direction of the then minister of Treasury Board at the time.

Mr. Speaker, I am actually dumbfounded by what appears to be something new and is something that has been discussed in Treasury Board over the years. Clearly, it's an indication that ministers were not following it. In other words, they were just feeding lip service to the President of Treasury Board. Now the new President of Treasury Board appears to be making it sound like it's a new idea, so everything that he must have said in Treasury Board clearly – and the Minister of Human Services, I have to say, was a member of Treasury Board when I sat on Treasury Board. I have to ask him. I remember you talking at the time about results based. I remember you talking about balancing budgets and zero-based budgeting, and for the life of me I am surprised how something like this could get through a government process such as Bill 1. It makes no sense, s-e-n-s-e and c-e-n-t-s. I'll say that slowly again for you if you would like. It makes no sense. It does not make any sense to Albertans. Bill 1, the Results-based Budgeting Act, in my view, is something that is a facade.

It has to be to the Minister of Finance an admission of the fact that ministers were not doing their job in following what the direction was over the last couple of years. I think a question that each minister has to ask as they look at themselves in the mirror would be: why haven't they been honouring their position and serving Albertans better by doing the job they were supposed to have done?

This bill rates right up there with the bill when they wanted to form a committee to study Asia Pacific. I love the Asia Pacific. I know the countries. We've visited the countries, my wife and I, in many instances. But let me tell you that you don't have to form a committee to be able to understand Asia Pacific. I could send over a globe, or I could send over an inflatable balloon that you blow up as a globe, and you could find out where Asia Pacific is.

Maybe what I need to do now is send over generally accepted accounting principles when it comes to zero-based budgeting, when it comes to results-based budgeting. This is a message to the government. Your Bill 1, Results-based Budgeting Act, put forward by the Premier – let me let you in on a little secret – is what Albertans have been doing for the many, many years. Finally, in the 21st century you're looking like it's Groundhog Day 2 and you didn't know what happened on Groundhog Day 1.

Well, I would only ask you to really think about this. Should this bill continue on, it really is laughable. I mean, I know the Premier has only been a minister of the Crown for three years. Perhaps she did not sit on Treasury Board before, and she doesn't understand budgeting. I don't know. But to allow this to go on? Wasn't any minister able to tell the Premier that this makes no sense, it's going to make us look bad, it's going to make the government look bad, it's going to make it look like we haven't been doing our jobs as ministers for the last three years? I know the Minister of Finance sat in that position, and he was on Treasury Board and sat in cabinet for the last three years. So the question would have to be: what was going on when all of this was happening?

Now, I know the Minister of Finance really didn't want to be the Minister of Finance pertaining to Bill 1. I know he would have preferred to stay as the Minister of Energy because it's a good springboard after politics. But the reality of it is, I understand, that the purported fiscal hawk on that side, the then Minister of Finance, essentially said: I don't want to leave. And guess what? The member from Bragg Creek finally basically said . . .

Mr. Anderson: Rocky View.

Mr. Boutilier: Foothills-Rocky View. Yeah. He actually said that. When the Premier called him pertaining to the bill, he said: "I don't want to be the Minister of Finance anymore. I want to be the Minister of Energy so that after I get my job, I can have a good springboard." The Minister of Finance knows and I know that in actual fact the Member for Foothills-Rocky View didn't want to be the Minister of Finance, so they gave it to the former Minister of Energy, who didn't want to be the Minister of Finance. Ultimately, it's like a calamity show over there, as if zero-based budgeting is just starting today. Perhaps the Minister of Human Services is not aware of the fact that the Minister of Finance did not want to be the Minister of Finance. I see the Treasury Board president is here.

Mr. Speaker, on Bill 1, Results-based Budgeting Act, I have to ask the President of the Treasury Board: what has he been doing, sleeping in cabinet for the last three years, when, in fact, direction was given by the previous Treasury Board president that you're supposed to be doing a program review? This is embarrassing. This is an admission that the government has been failing in the Treasury Board because ministers were not doing their job. As the former minister of advanced education why weren't you doing your job? You know why? Because you weren't listening to Albertans.

I'm glad to see that the Treasury Board president is here today and that he's paying attention to me. You can learn a lot. Why? Because I am speaking on behalf of Albertans. And as a person who teaches at the University of Alberta, you can really learn a lot. [interjections]

5:40

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, you still have the floor.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you. Regardless of being interrupted by the Treasury Board president, the Minister of Education, I'm pleased to say that I'm glad to see that the actual Treasury Board president is listening. The question I'll be asking will be: why have you been slipping? Are you going to return your 30 per cent salary increase? Because you haven't been doing your job as you sat on Treasury Board. You obviously haven't been doing your job, and this is an admission. You didn't even have the courage to tell the Premier under Bill 1 that all of us as ministers are supposed to have been doing this for the last three years. Really, I guess, we're learning what ministers have been doing or, in fact, have not been doing.

I see the Minister of Finance. His lip is up, so that means that I'm really getting to him right about now. I'm glad to see that he's listening to what I am saying, because Bill 1 really is a waste of a bill. It's something that every organization, Alberta families have been exercising for years. Finally, now, it's an admission that ministers of the Crown over the last couple of years have not been following the direction of the former Treasury Board president. Clearly, this really is an insult to Albertans.

Bill 1, in my judgment, as I look at the actual completion of a review of programs or services: my goodness, what have you been doing for the last three years? The Minister of Human Service has indicated: oh well, Mr. President of Treasury Board, I'm reviewing my programs all the time. It appears that he hasn't been. The Minister of Finance, who was Minister of Education, who was minister of health – that was absolutely a wrecking ball – said he was reviewing. Mr. Speaker, clearly, he hasn't been reviewing because it looks like this is just a new idea.

Then, by the way, there are the reports. "The President of Treasury Board and Enterprise shall, no later than October 1 of

each year . . .” My question is: what have these members of Treasury Board been doing over the last two years? I can only say that they haven’t been doing their job, and clearly they should just give back the 30 per cent increase that they gave to themselves. They were interested in doing that, but when it came to actually looking at the results and actually doing what Alberta families are doing, they didn’t do it.

Bill 1 is an admission that you haven’t been doing your job, ladies and gentlemen on the front bench, over the last two years. And that, in fact, is actually disappointing because even a basic level of competence would be able to do that, because we as Albertans believe that budgeting is important.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the time has lapsed.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Oui, M. le Président. Pensez-vous que le projet de loi 1 est seulement une diversion, une politique, une proposition du jour au lieu d’une vraie méthode qui pourrait réussir?

Mr. Boutilier: C’est une bonne question. On parle l’anglais pour le bénéfice de l’Assemblée.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear to the members on this side that in terms of la question posée, the question that you posed, it is one that is – I know they do not have a written translation, but would you like a translation of the question that was asked? Well, the member of Treasury Board would not like to have the translation. I don’t know if he’s insulting the people in St. Paul who are French people or Plamondon. I’m not so sure.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I can only say this: this government has not been able to grasp a very basic principle, the principle of budgeting like all other families in Alberta, like other businesses in Alberta. It’s like it’s a revelation to them. That’s why this is an admission that this government has lost its way.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d just like to ask the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo: do you have any thoughts on why we would need to pass an act such as Bill 1, the flagship legislation of this Premier, that essentially says that we need to make sure we’re getting results from the budget? I always thought legislation had a purpose, that you were trying to do something that required the seal of approval, the authority of Legislature. I mean, obviously, we have a Finance minister, we have a cabinet, we have a Treasury Board. Clearly, we have ministries and ministers of those ministries, and they can go through their budgets and make sure that they’re getting value for money. They always say that they’re doing that.

At every debate on the budget that I’ve ever been to, they’ve said that they’ve been doing this exact thing that they’re now legislating. It appears to me that this is just showmanship and nothing more than that, so I’m wondering why we would pass a bill to legislate what they can do right now.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, that’s exactly, Mr. Speaker, what Albertans and Alberta families are asking. I think the deeper, inside baseball question is that you have a Minister of Finance who doesn’t want to be the Minister of Finance; he preferred to be the Minister of Energy. But when the Premier called him – and by the way I have this from a good, authoritative source – he said: I don’t want to be the Minister of Finance; I want to stay in Energy. But the problem was that the member who was the Minister of Energy, in actual

fact – guess what? He wanted to be the Minister of Energy so he could have a springboard after politics.

So you have a Minister of Finance who doesn’t want to be the Minister of Finance. On his advice to the Premier, he probably said: I can’t think of anything because Finance is not my bag, so I might as well go ahead and come up with something that, really, every minister was supposed to have done in the past.

The Speaker: Any additional questions? Are there additional speakers on this bill?

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to participate in the debate on second reading.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to stand in second reading of Bill 1, the Results-based Budgeting Act. I’m still waiting for that magic day when Bill 1 will actually mean something in this Legislature, when they’ll actually bring something forward with substance, when there will be some kind of light that will go on and they’ll actually bring a piece of legislation to start it off that will really move this province in the right direction on various issues, whether it be the way we handle our health care system or the way to improve our democracy. There are so many things in the democratic process that could be improved that would make for a great Bill 1, whether it’s mandatory free votes by making sure that votes of nonconfidence are not attached to every vote of the Legislature so that we could have free votes in this Legislature without the government failing.

Perhaps we could pass a bill – and maybe the Minister of Education could take note of this; he seems pretty talkative right now – that would make sure that we have a transparent list, posted publicly, of the communities that need schools in the order and the priority that they’re going to be given schools. That would allow the public to have faith that how schools are funded is not based on politics but rather on some objective funding formula based on student population and the like.

There are a hundred examples of things that would really make a great Bill 1, that would be substantive and would improve democracy, education, health care, and many different things. Yet here we are again, like Groundhog Day, talking about a Bill 1 that essentially is just a press release. That’s about the worth of it because it does absolutely nothing to better the lives of Albertans.

5:50

Results-based budgeting is something that I would hope – I would hope – every ministry would be doing right now and would have been doing for the last 40 years. It’s shocking to me. I mean, you just read through the act:

The Treasury Board shall provide for a comprehensive review of the programs and services provided by the Government and its agencies.

Well, I know for a fact that while I was over there, there was an attempt to do that by the former Treasury Board president. So, okay, they obviously don’t need authority to do that.

(2) The review must be conducted in the manner and in accordance with a schedule as directed by the Treasury Board and must include an assessment as to whether the programs and services provided by the Government and its agencies meet their intended objectives and whether they are being delivered in an efficient and effective manner.

Well, again, the Treasury Board, I’m assuming, was already doing that. We have three-year business plans that we go through in Public Accounts and so forth. I thought the government was already doing that, and then we would assess whether they actually were meeting their objectives in Public Accounts and in estimates and in other things that we go through.

(3) For the purpose of conducting a review under this Act, in addition to members of the public service, external experts may be engaged as the Treasury Board considers necessary.

Well, clearly, right now the Treasury Board is able to bring in anybody they want. There's a long history of very lucrative contracts and bringing in experts that this government has done in order to do things like this, with mixed results.

And then it says,

(4) Albertans will have the opportunity to participate in the review.

As the current Treasury Board president always said, "I guess that's what the cabinet tour was for," you know, to go around and talk to Albertans.

I'm looking at this whole first section, the main part of this bill, and I'm noticing that there's nothing in here that they can't do right now or that they shouldn't have already been doing over the last four years.

We go on to results-based budgeting, the next paragraph, section 2, and it says:

2 On completion of a review of a program or service, a results-based budget process must be used as an approach for the next budget planning cycle for that program or service.

What on earth were they doing before this if they weren't already doing this?

On completion of a review of a program or service, a results-based budget process must be used.

I'm at a loss as to what they were doing if they weren't already doing this. We need legislation to legislate that they do the jobs that I would assume they were doing but apparently they weren't? I mean, you can see why people would get a little bit cynical about the usefulness of this bill and of the hours in the Legislature to pass a press release.

The reason we're speaking to this even though we find it so worthless, in case you are wondering at home, is because we're tired of silly legislation like this being brought forward and getting all this time and attention when it doesn't do anything. Meanwhile, we don't have fixed election dates. We don't have voter recall. We don't have free votes. We don't have a transparent infrastructure list so that everybody knows in what order they're getting their infrastructure and their schools and their hospitals and so forth. We don't have any of that. Next Legislature, regardless of who's in the government or what it looks like, let's make sure that Bill 1 is actually something that we can show to Albertans and be proud of and actually achieve an objective that needs legislative consent to occur. This certainly is not one of them.

I would ask, as well: why would the Premier back away from what it was before? When she announced a couple weeks ago that she was going in this direction, she told one of the newspapers that there would be zero-based budgeting. Well, zero-based budgeting is not the same as results-based budgeting, clearly. The Premier has said that it's not the same thing. She's backed away from it. It's not zero-based budgeting. Zero-based budgeting is very different from whatever results-based budgeting is. I'm assuming that every Legislature on the planet does results-based budgeting. I would hope so. I think they do. It's a good bet that every single one would say: we do results-based budgeting.

Mr. Boutilier: Every province in Canada.

Mr. Anderson: Well, certainly every province in Canada but also every Legislature in the world in the new Westminster system.

Mr. Chase: Except Greece.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. That's right.

The point is that if they're already doing that, why do we need this law? Again, if Bill 1 was zero-based budgeting, I would say that in that case, well, perhaps then it's worth a Bill 1. I don't think you need legislation to do zero-based budgeting. I think it's just something you can do, that you can just announce and do as a cabinet. You don't need legislation to give you authority to do it.

Zero-based budgeting, of course, means that for every single ministry every single year or maybe every two years or three years, whatever you decide to do, their budget starts out at zero. It means you have to justify as a minister and as a ministry every single expense that is made, you know, from what hospitals you're building or upkeeping and all that sort of thing to the wages that you're paying out to your bureaucrats or to front-line workers, et cetera. You have to justify all of that every year to make sure these are actually programs and expenses that mean something.

Of course, most of those expenses, I would hope, are meaningful and would continue on. For example, paying nurses or teachers would be important to keeping going with, obviously. But there are always some programs in government that are not useful, that are unneeded, duplicative, redundant, silly, don't achieve the results that people are looking for, are overfinanced, underfinanced, et cetera, et cetera. When you have zero-based budgeting, those are the programs that you seek to eliminate. If you can't justify them in that year, then they can't be justified and you have to get rid of them.

The way it goes on in government is that when you have a lot of outdated programs – and useless, redundant programs continue on long after they're needed, long after they've been effective. Some are proven completely ineffective, and we could list a long list of ineffective programs that have occurred although we don't have time for that because I only have about a minute left.

The point is that you say to the bureaucracy: "Look. You go look at every single program you have because you're not getting money for any program unless you can justify it." That's zero-based budgeting. It's a good fiscal conservative principle, and it's one that we would support this government in doing if they were willing to do it. It looked like they were going to do that, which is straight right out of the Wildrose policy book and has been there for the last two years. It would be something that, obviously, we would support. Instead, they changed it from zero-based budgeting to results-based budgeting. I mean, you could drive a tractor through what that means. Who knows what that even means?

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that it's important, when we come in here to this Legislature and debate bills, that they're bills that actually do something, that they're needed, that we need legislative consent, legislative authority, and that's why we're here passing it, that it's not something that essentially is a glorified press release for this new Premier of Alberta, who is becoming legendary for the fact that she says a lot that doesn't mean a whole lot. It's very silly. Whether it's fixed election dates or whatever, she says one thing; she does another. She said she wanted zero-based budgeting. Now we've got results-based budgeting. You know, if I was the former Treasury Board president or any former minister, I would be offended by the fact that they were questioning that I wasn't already doing results-based budgeting.

Just give me one thing that's different now, that we need legislative authority to do, and maybe I can support this bill. Until I get that from the members opposite, you know, it's going to be very difficult for me to support this bill going forward.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but the House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

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

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