



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 3

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature

Fifth Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
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Zwozdesky, Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)	Knight, Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)
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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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Ron Liepert	Minister of Finance
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Jonathan Denis	Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
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Evan Berger	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Political Minister for Southern Alberta
Frank Oberle	Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
George VanderBurg	Minister of Seniors
Ray Danyluk	Minister of Transportation
Jeff Johnson	Minister of Infrastructure, Political Minister for Northern Alberta
Doug Griffiths	Minister of Municipal Affairs
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Arno Doerksen	Human Services
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Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

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DeLong
Groeneveld
Johnston
MacDonald
Quest
Taft

Standing Committee on Community Development

Chair: Mrs. Jablonski
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Amery
Blakeman
Boutilier
Calahasen
Goudreau
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Standing Committee on Education

Chair: Ms Pastoor
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Cao
Chase
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Notley
Sarich
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Bhardwaj
Blakett
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Rodney
Rogers
Swann
Woo-Paw

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 9, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly a group of students from Forest Lawn high school. Fifty students are accompanied by teachers Tina Merali and Ron Lee and teacher helper Shirley Buchanan. Forest Lawn is a banner school in Calgary, rich in diversity and accomplishments, with students eager to learn and succeed in the land of Alberta. They are hosted by myself and the hon. members for Calgary-East, Calgary-Montrose, and Calgary-Mackay.

Many Governor General's award recipients, doctors, and other professionals can proudly name Forest Lawn as their high school. In fact, the son and the daughter of the hon. Member for Calgary-East proudly graduated from Forest Lawn high school and are now a lawyer and a banker.

I would ask all the students to rise and receive the traditional welcome from the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a very long list for introductions today, so brevity would be very much appreciated.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very special guests from Camrose, Camrose city manager Damian Herle and former mayor of Camrose Norm Mayer. Damian actually was a policeman first and served for 26 years in Camrose prior to 2003. He then became active in the city administration and is now city manager. He's lived in Camrose for over 33 years with his wife, Glenda, and their two children.

Norm Mayer is a very close friend. He served three terms as an alderman in Camrose in the '70s and '80s and then became mayor and was mayor for 15 years. The really significant thing about Norm – and he's a person that works harder than anybody I know – is that he didn't miss a meeting in something like 22 years of service on city council. With his impressive work in public service he's also been very involved in the community. He is also married and a proud husband, father, and grandfather.

Both of these gentlemen have made significant contributions to the community, and I'd like them to be recognized. I hope they're here. If they are, would they please rise.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me tremendous pleasure today to introduce six very special people, my wife of 40 years, Linda – I'm not quite sure how she's

managed, but she has – my daughter, Kylee, and her friend Taylor Marshall; my son, Cody; my sister Judy and her husband, Lynn Toth. They're here not only for the budget address, but none have ever been to question period, and I have warned them it could be a life-altering experience. I will ask them to stand and be recognized by the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to introduce to you two constituents of mine. Donna Karlzen is a friend, a constituent, a supporter, and also the mother of my scheduling assistant, Amanda. She's an active volunteer in the constituency, and she's patiently waiting for a son-in-law and grandchildren. I think all of us are looking forward to Amanda having a boyfriend someday before she starts that, though.

With her is Eric Karlzen, and he's been a resident of Whitecourt-St. Anne for 76 years. He sets a wonderful example for seniors in Alberta. This man is the go-to guy in Evansburg. He is always involved in work that needs to be done. He's a great volunteer, a great Albertan.

I introduce them to all of you, and I'd ask them to please stand and be recognized by this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very valuable members of my constituency. Not only are they valuable members of my constituency; they are dedicated and committed to the communities in which they serve. They are entrepreneurs and supporters of their communities not only as businessmen but also as reeve of the county of Smoky Lake, Mr. Dareld Cholak, and as councillor, Mr. Ron Bobocel. If I could ask the Assembly to please recognize their efforts.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this House my wife and companion of 28 years. It was a few years before that, but that's another story. I could imagine that it would maybe be possible to do this job without the support of a spouse, but I can't imagine why one would want to. Debbie, please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me today to introduce to you and through you five individuals that are here to join us for the budget. First of all, Michelle Tetreault and Darwin Durmie. Darwin, of course, has served as president of the Public Works Association for North America this past year and is an amazing contributing member, as is Michelle, to volunteer efforts throughout Alberta and in the local community. Darwin is originally from Drumheller, so his roots go right back to my constituency.

Also with us today are Joe Gendre and James Nibourg, councillors from the county of Stettler who have come today to join us for the budget. They've also brought with them James' son Isaac to get a taste of democracy at this level in Alberta and to enjoy this process.

I'd ask them all to please rise and be recognized by all of my colleagues.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a constituent, Mr. Bryan Walton. Bryan is also the chief executive officer of Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association. He is with his son-in-law Phil Bourgeois today. Phil resides in Okotoks. I'd like you to please join me in giving my guests the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a constituent of mine, Tammy Maloney. She's a strong advocate for social entrepreneurship in Alberta. After obtaining her master's degree, an MBA with a focus in entrepreneurship, overseas in Europe, she returned to Calgary to start her own social entrepreneur agency called SEACHange, which is focused on providing meaningful employment opportunities that serve as a bridge to the mainstream economy for people currently dependent on social services to meet their needs.

Also with her is Izabela Galazka, who is here today after surviving her teens on the streets and in the youth homeless system in Calgary. Izabela has reached stability in her life thanks to the hard work and relentless determination from organizations such as the Alex Youth Health Centre and social programs such as AISH. Her hope is that her employment at SEACHange will help her transition away from AISH to a life of financial independence and self-reliance.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask both of these individuals to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly she who survived growing up with me, my wonderful sister Sharon van Doesburg and her husband, Rob. They're accompanied by their daughter Gemma and their son Sam, former Edmontonians now living in Castlegar, B.C., and visiting here today. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly four municipal leaders from my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. It is such a pleasure to have these constituents here today for the delivery of Budget 2012. They are not only fabulous people but great Albertans, and I am blessed to be working with them. Please rise as I say your name: His Worship Larry Lofstrand, mayor of the village of Glendon; His Worship Craig Copeland, mayor of the city of Cold Lake; Lorna Storoschuk, deputy mayor of the town of Bonnyville; Mike Krywiak, councillor for the municipal district of Bonnyville and also a former teaching colleague of mine. Please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's really an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly and all Albertans some very good friends. Dennis

and Linda Hueppelsheuser live just west of Blackfalds. My wife, Pauline, is with them as well. I've known Dennis and Linda since 1971, when I worked for Dennis in the fields. He had about 3,000 acres of farming. I worked with him in the fields, and Pauline worked for Linda in the house, doing domestic work. That's when I got to know Pauline quite well. I knew that she was a good cook and could do wonderful things, so after some time I married her. Dennis and Linda have been very active members of their community. They've been active members of the Flying Farmers. I think Linda was a president of Flying Farmers for some time. Dennis actually worked in this building 50 years ago for the ministry of agriculture, so he's been around this place a few times, but that was in 1961 and 1962. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislature two great Albertans, Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop, founders of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta, an organization dedicated to fulfilling the premise that farm workers are persons within the great dominion of Canada. In the tradition of the Famous Five, who achieved equality for women, they continue to give their lifeblood to provide for the equal treatment of farm workers as every other person in the dominion of Canada, even Alberta. Would they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly our guest, Mandy Melynk. Mandy grew up in the small farming community of Waskatenau and today makes a living as a small farmer selling beef, pork, and poultry. She served for three years as the youth VP of the National Farmers Union and is a founding member of the Coalition for a Nuclear Free Alberta as well as Our Water Is Not for Sale. We are proud to have her as our candidate in the constituency of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. I would now like to ask Mandy to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guest, Lorna Watkins-Zimmer. Lorna owns and operates a small business in downtown Red Deer and served on city council for 15 years. She was born in the U.K. and immigrated to Canada at an early age and graduated from the U of C with a bachelor of education. We're extremely proud and excited to have her as our candidate in Red Deer-South. I hope that she's here. I would ask that she now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour and privilege for me to introduce four people to you today. They are seated in your gallery. First of all, my very able and capable constituency assistant, Emma Ronan. Emma, if you'd stand. Emma is sporting a new engagement ring. Congratulations, Emma. You'll have to look at it. It's a pretty fancy ring.

I'd also like to introduce some good friends of ours, David and Cheryl Andrews. If they'd stand. They are strong supporters of mine in my constituency. Cheryl is retired from a very successful teaching career. Dave, in addition to being a very successful farmer and rancher in the area, is past chairman of the Alberta Beef Producers and of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and president in the past and currently the chairman of the Canadian Cattlemen Market Development Council.

Joining them today is my friend and partner in life, my spouse, my wife, Wanda. I also could not imagine doing this job without her support. We will anticipate celebrating 29 years of marriage next Sunday.

I'd ask you to all join me in giving them a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four members of the Ainsworth family. If they could please stand – Emily is already up – mother, Alison; son, Nathan; a daughter, Emily; and Emily's super service dog, Levi, who is much better behaved than I am. Please welcome them.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions this afternoon. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two key members of the Edmonton-Calder community. I'll introduce each of them, and then I'll ask them to rise in unison. The first is Ms Rochelle Marshall. Rochelle is a well-known and very competent political insider who has worked with me on many campaigns and who has an uncanny ability to interpret and examine cold data. Accompanying her today is Mr. Kevin Taron, the CFO of the Edmonton-Calder constituency association but a man whose real claim to fame is his ability and his passion for door-knocking. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them now to rise to receive the traditional greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Water.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to rise today and introduce three special guests that are here today, the first from Drayton Valley, the chair of St. Thomas Aquinas school division and past president of ACSTA, my good friend Sandra Bannard. From the town of Devon we have two outstanding municipal leaders joining us here today, Mayor Anita Fisher and Councillor Dan Woodcock. Let's please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Oral Question Period

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

Electricity Prices

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier claimed deregulated electricity prices ensure "that industry is going to be able to afford to keep operating." Well, when prices spiked last month to over 90 cents a kilowatt hour, companies like AltaSteel and Whitecourt's Alberta Newsprint Company shut down production because they said, quote, it is completely uneconomical, unquote, to continue operating. To the Premier: why does this

government insist on continuing this ideological crusade despite such overwhelming evidence against electricity deregulation?

Ms Redford: We have certainly had the privilege of visiting some of those business enterprises that the hon. member is speaking about. It was very informative for me to be able to spend time with them. You know, any business needs to make decisions with respect to input costs. One of the things that they showed me was that there are times when there is variation in electrical prices, and because of that, they'll sometimes slow down operations, and there are certain points in time when they will decide for a short period of time to stop production. But, Mr. Speaker, this was explained to me completely as part of what they even now consider to be normal operations. It is certainly not the ideal, but it is something that goes on on a regular basis.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these are the same input costs that are passed down to the consumer and the same input costs that lead to job losses, I asked if the Premier would give Albertans a break in the skyrocketing power bills. The Premier said, "We will do what this caucus and cabinet cares about." Wow. Would the Premier care to tell us if this government has any plan to bring down utility rates and give hard-working Albertans a break?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not exactly sure where the Leader of the Opposition is going with this. Perhaps he'd like to go to Hydro-Québec or Hydro Ontario, which, for the information of caucus, have run up \$62 billion and \$36 billion, respectively, in debt. Consumers there are paying not just for electricity but for the debt of past governments. Here in Alberta you pay for electricity once. We pay once, and that's it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That question was to the Premier. I didn't realize the Minister of Energy was the Premier.

Given that the Minister of Energy said that TransAlta's \$370,000 fine for manipulating prices shows that "the system does work," can the Premier please explain who this system is working for: Albertans, who got gouged an extra \$5.5 million on their power bills, or the big company, who got a slap on the wrist?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to answer the same question for two days in a row. Just as these irregularities occurred, they were detected in real time. It shows the system is working. A decision went to the appropriate committee, and TransAlta was fined for that transaction.

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

Accommodation and Health Care for Seniors

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's try this again. Yesterday the Premier flatly denied any privatization of seniors' care yet in the same breath talked about new options and, quote, creative work with respect to accommodations, unquote. This government is subsidizing private corporations, who then turn around and gouge our seniors for basic services like a walk, a bath, or even a trip to the washroom. Can the Premier tell us why

this government is subsidizing private corporations instead of funding the public delivery of quality care for seniors? Come on, Premier.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this government provides public health care to seniors that allows seniors to live in dignity. We are also going to ensure that all Alberta seniors have appropriate accommodation that allows them to live with dignity and respect and that they have choice. I expect that over the next two months we are going to hear many allegations of circumstances with respect to accommodation arrangements that simply aren't the case, and every single time that it happens, we will correct the facts.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, given that on my trip around Alberta, from Medicine Hat to Bonnyville, there are senior couples who are being forced to get separated, I don't know if that's the dignity the Premier refers to.

The Premier in her maiden speech said, "Allowing private industry to meet seniors' needs will create more jobs in many different sectors and steady growth for our economy." How can the Premier deny that all this government is doing is turning our seniors into ATMs for their private-sector buddies?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the comments that I made in that speech I stand by. We are not a government that believes that the only way to provide accommodation services to seniors is for us as the government to build the facility and staff it completely. We believe that Albertans want choice. We have been told that Alberta seniors want choice, and we are going to give them that choice.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that under the Premier's scheme high-income seniors get better health care than low-income seniors or middle-income seniors, how can the Premier say that this arrangement is anything but a two-tiered health care system for a select few?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I fundamentally disagree with the hon. member's first assertion. We have a public health care system in this province. Every Albertan is entitled to and receives the same health care services, whether they are a senior or not and no matter what their income. I will tell you that this government is committed to that and will ensure that that continues to be the case.

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

Castle-Crown Wilderness Area

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's version of protection for a designated special place like the Castle-Crown is to allow commercial logging to create fence posts. Its version of protecting threatened species like the grizzly and black bear is to allow logging equipment to crush these hibernating bears and their newborn cubs and destroy their habitat. Bottom line: this government is allowing a situation where a designated special place and the lives and habitats of bears are being destroyed. To the Premier: why does the Castle-Crown have to provide the trees for fence posts? Why this particular area, which is a special place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To begin with, the exaggeration in the preamble of that was nothing short of outrageous. The fact of the matter is that there is no logging in any park in Alberta. There will not be any logging in parks. The area that the member refers to is not in fact a park; it's a very carefully managed area. That's the mission of my department, that we balance sound environmentally responsible development with the needs of wildlife, watershed, all the environmental considerations.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the Premier: why did the government sign a contract agreeing to provide maps of wildlife den locations when it was clear that with only one staff person for the whole of the south Rockies it was impossible to fulfill this commitment? Why would you do that?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the government has wildlife experts. The company engages wildlife experts. The fact of the matter is that often in cases these dens or important wildlife features aren't known until somebody is actually walking around the site. I don't see anything wrong with our biologists working with company executives or field personnel to try and do the best job possible to identify these sites. We have fully taken into consideration the needs of bears and other wildlife species in this.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry he doesn't know his own agreements. To the minister: why does SRD stipulate special considerations for winter bear dens through numerous sections of – I'll say it slowly – Spray Lake Sawmills and C05, operating ground rules, signed in January of 2011, and call for the protection of bear dens when the department and minister know they don't have the staff, the data, or the money?

Mr. Oberle: Whoa. Mr. Speaker, apparently she didn't hear the last answer. Let me tell you something. Every single inch of our province is important wildlife habitat for something, and we consider it when we develop our landscape in a sustainable, responsible manner.

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

Provincial Fiscal Framework

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the 1993 federal election PC leader Kim Campbell uttered the now infamous words: an election is not a time to discuss serious issues. Yesterday the Finance minister had a Kim Campbell moment of his own when he told reporters that being honest with Albertans on what taxes the Premier will raise is "not something you're going to do in the space of a few weeks prior to [a provincial] election." To the Premier: do you agree with your Finance minister that Albertans should be kept in the dark as to which taxes you plan to raise if you are re-elected?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important, first of all, that we correct what this hon. member said in his preamble. What I said was that we do not have the time prior to an election to engage in a thorough conversation with Albertans about what a fiscal framework should look like. I'm sorry that he has a hearing problem, but those are the facts.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, again, the Premier must be afraid to answer the question to her. Why are you afraid to tell Albertans what you plan to do about taxes? Do you plan to raise them or not?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I think that today is such an important day for Alberta. First of all, I'm glad that the minister had an opportunity to correct the hon. member with respect to his comments. The reason for that is that Albertans know that a two-, three-week, two-month period is not enough time to fully address a fiscal framework. That is why we alluded to the fact that this discussion must begin in the throne speech on Tuesday. And it will continue. It will continue for some time because it matters to Albertans. Today at 3:15 we are going to see a fiscal plan that Albertans will be proud of, and at that time Albertans will know who they can trust.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier for answering. I'm not talking about the budget; I'm talking about after the election. My question to the Premier is this. Will you be honest with Albertans and be truthful and open and transparent that you will not raise their taxes?

Ms Redford: I am honest with Albertans every day, Mr. Speaker. This budget today will set a plan for Alberta that will make it very clear to Albertans where we are going in one year, two years, and three years. Today at 3:15 Albertans will have confidence in what their future will be.

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

Health Services for North Edmonton

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The north side of Edmonton is very short of physicians and other health care professionals. It has many needs that other parts of the province don't necessarily have. I want to ask the health minister why the East Edmonton health centre has still not been funded – it's only \$9 million – and why this government is ignoring the health care needs of the people who live on the north side of Edmonton.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is certainly not ignoring the needs of any Albertan in any part of the province. With respect to the East Edmonton health centre, as the hon. member knows, planning and implementation have been under way for some time to fully open the centre. There are a very large number of people with no attachment to primary health care that live in that area. I am satisfied that these plans are moving very quickly.

I think if the hon. member chooses to stay tuned at 3:15 this afternoon, he may hear some other news that encourages him with respect to advancements in this area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have certainly been working very hard with the citizens of my constituency to force this government to open that, and if that is meant to be a hint that it's going to be in the budget, then I'm going to take a lot of credit for the fact that I forced this government to open it.

At the same time, we still have real, serious problems with the emergency room at the Royal Alex. It's not meeting its goals. The people on the north side of Edmonton are not having their health care needs met by this government. When are you going to make sure that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister, please.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to suggest that any hon. member of this House should take hints prematurely. What I was talking about was access to primary health care, and I know this hon. member is aware of the challenges in that regard. If he has paid attention to the work we have done through primary care networks and now family care clinics, he will see that we are talking about much more than the bricks and mortar in anyone's constituency; we are talking about the ability of those teams to reach out and work with communities to improve health in the long term.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that I don't understand what the minister is talking about, whether it's primary care or whether it's opening the Northeast health centre, I want to ask him to make sure that the necessary services – that is, access to physicians, to dentists, and to other health care professionals – and action to bring down wait times at the Royal Alex ER are in fact going to be done by this government because so far people have suffered for years because of your inaction.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I'll certainly agree with the hon. member on his first point in terms of knowing what we're talking about. Once again, what we are talking about here is access to primary health care. I certainly don't hesitate to give the hon. member credit for raising concerns about access in that part of the city. We have a number of initiatives under way to reduce waiting times in emergency departments. The first step is to make sure people have a place to go to, and they have a place to go to now in the form of the East Edmonton health centre.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In her leadership bid the Premier indicated South African President Nelson Mandela as a mentor. In the same *Herald* article she said, "the family farm clause is being used as a loophole" and promised to close it if she was elected Premier. Yet in her letter of January 23 this year she said, I quote: in cases where the employer does not have WCB, the farm worker and family can sue the employer for compensation for work-related injuries. End quote. To the Premier: as a lawyer and QC why doesn't the Premier acknowledge that it is grossly unfair to expect a vulnerable, injured farm worker to sue their employer?

[Several members rose]

Ms Redford: Apparently, we were all ready to answer the question, Mr. Speaker.

You know, what we know is that right now in Alberta the law with respect to these issues is quite unclear. There is no doubt that there are circumstances where there has to be support for a family farm. There are also circumstances where we have to ensure that workers are protected. I think that the circumstances in many of these situations are not clear, and there does need to be work done with respect to this. This government has begun to do that work, and we will conclude that work in good time.

Dr. Swann: This government has been avoiding this issue, denying this issue for 20 years. Committee after committee has said that this isn't worth changing.

Given that widow Lorna Chandler from Black Diamond has been fighting in the national court for some compensation for five years for the death of her husband in a farm-related accident, why will you not do the right thing and ensure that farm workers are covered by WCB?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, my ministry is responsible for the WCB and for occupational health and safety standards, and we've been looking very closely at issues with respect to occupational health and safety, not just in industry and business in residential areas around the province but also on farms. The minister of agriculture approximately a year ago had a committee established to take a look in depth at the issues with respect to farms. It is complicated with respect to farms because they're family-owned operations. Families in the past have not asked for workers' compensation protection, but one of the things I do know from what I've looked at so far is that accident rates on farms are lower than actually . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please. [interjection] The hon. member, please.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, it's time for this government to stop looking and start acting. Unbelievable: favouring multinational agribusiness over basic rights of farm workers.

Mandela is a world champion human rights lawyer. How can this Premier, a QC and human rights advocate herself, allow discriminatory practices to continue that violate the Canadian Constitution and the Alberta bill of human rights?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is making conclusions that are actually not appropriate because some of these matters are before the court.

Also, what I will tell you is that, as the minister has said, these issues are starting to be considered. We are seeing action on this. This is not a government that's avoiding these issues, but I will tell you there are an awful lot of people that own farms in this province who are not multinational corporations, and they need to be protected as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Electricity Prices

(continued)

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents in Little Bow have recently received their power bills for January 2012 indicating a 30 per cent plus increase over the previous month of December. Compared to the same period last year, the increases are hard to understand when one considers the relatively mild winter that we've just had. To the Minister of Finance: when individual consumption is down, why has the kilowatt cost of power gone from 6.864 cents in December '10 to 13.178 cents per kilowatt . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister, please.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, as I explained yesterday, there were three large generating plants that were out during the month of December. I would point out to Albertans that in the month of

December they could have paid 8 cents a kilowatt hour if they'd been on a fixed-rate contract. Albertans have the choice. You can have the regulated rate option, which goes up and down month by month, or you can fix in. In the month of December the fixed-rate contracts were in the 8- to 9-cent range.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary question. Why haven't these companies at least done their scheduled maintenance during the low-cost downtime, primarily in summer, rather than having these problems in the winter months?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure the MLA from Little Bow and Albertans that the Alberta Electric System Operator does require that maintenance be regularly scheduled in the off-seasons, which are spring and fall. But things happen. Unplanned breakdowns and unexpected outages happen. That's what happened in November, December.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Then my final question. Why can't some of the Balancing Pool monies be used to prebuy some of the blocks of energy and reapply it to the residential and small-business community rather than a minor, minor rebate that comes through, that appears to be just the interest on that money?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the money in the Balancing Pool is not guaranteed. It sits there to cover other expenses as they occur. These include expenses like site reclamation costs and power purchase agreements. It would not be sound fiscal management to use the Balancing Pool for purposes other than what it's set up for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Poverty Reduction

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. For some reason this government strongly resists embracing and implementing a poverty reduction plan. The line from the minister is that the department has more and better programs than anywhere else. Oh, no. This government does not, not with the level of poverty that we have in a province with \$100-a-barrel oil. To the Minister of Human Services: when did the government get so flush that they could afford to ignore the annual expenditure of \$7 billion to \$9 billion that could be implemented by adopting an integrated poverty reduction strategy?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has clearly misinterpreted what I've been saying on this. We're not at all suggesting that we should ignore the expense to our society and the impact on individuals that results from poverty. Quite the contrary. Our Premier has indicated that people are our most important resource. This government cares about people. I have been mandated to deal with the social policy framework, which will deal precisely with that issue. The poverty reduction strategy is one part of that. The homelessness strategy, which has proved so effective, is a pretty good model, and we are progressing on that as we speak.

Ms Blakeman: Actually, the municipalities are progressing on that. You guys aren't doing very much at all.

Why does the government persist in saying that their services are great? Go read your own press. Is the minister satisfied with 73,000 children living in poverty? What's best or first class about that?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, in this province we need to care about each and every one of our children. We need to plan for the success of each and every child in this province. If we want to break the poverty cycle, we have to focus on how we can make sure that every child can come to school ready to learn, that an education system helps every child achieve their potential. That's the goal of this government. That's why we're doing a comprehensive social policy framework, and that's why we'll be reviewing each and every one of the programs we have to make sure that it's achieving those results.

Ms Blakeman: Sorry. No school hunger program. Nothing.

Given that Albertans living in poverty are falling further behind the low-income cut-off than other provinces, can the minister tell us: what is this government's resistance to improving their circumstances? Clearly, those best programs are not doing it. Why can't we have an integrated poverty reduction strategy?

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member is clearly not paying attention. We're working on that integrated strategy with respect to a social policy framework that works to the success of every Albertan. If there are programs that we have now that are not working, I invite that hon. member to step forward as we review those programs to make sure that we have the programs and we use the money that we have in this province to achieve the results that Albertans want, and that's success for every child.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Urgent Care Services

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention approximately 40 per cent of visits to hospital emergency rooms are non-urgent or semi-urgent problems more appropriate for urgent care. An urgent care centre in a central Alberta rural community could help alleviate some of the wait times in the emergency room at the Red Deer regional hospital. Can the minister tell us what the difference is between services provided in an emergency room and services provided at an urgent care centre?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the difference is the following. Urgent care centres provide same-day or evening treatment for non life-threatening health issues such as broken bones and cuts and infections. Emergency rooms are intended to provide services to address life-threatening issues.

The hon. member is right. In many cases urgent care centres can save emergency department resources when they are available in the community.

Mrs. Jablonski: Also to the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that we know emergency services cannot be available in every community and Alberta's rural communities are looking for options to have their health concerns addressed on a timely basis, what other options do they have?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly a number of rural communities are asking for urgent care centres to be added to the

range of health care services available in their community. They can play an important role, as I said earlier, but I think first of all we need to look at the primary health care resources that are actually available in the community because, as we've said many times in this House, it is that availability of the primary health care provider – be it a doctor, a nurse practitioner, or another member of the team, that team-based attachment – that is able to offer Albertans access to the services they need most often.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the MLA for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has met with constituents that have concerns about their need for urgent care services in their community, how is the minister addressing these concerns?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for that constituency has in fact communicated with me about the needs expressed by his constituents. He and I will be meeting in the next couple of weeks with the mayor and members of council from that community. I hope to discuss with them their interest in an urgent care centre, but I also want to take the opportunity to look at what other health care services are available in that community and whether some of those services might meet the needs that are identified.

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

Childhood Hunger

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We all know this government has 70,000 taxpayer dollars for a caucus retreat to a luxury hotel in Jasper, and we also all know that it constantly refuses to fund programs to feed the thousands of little children who sit in school hungry every day in Alberta through no fault of their own. That \$70,000 could have funded a much-needed meal program at a school where Alberta's children are at a high risk of hunger. To the Minister of Education: why does this government tolerate thousands of hungry schoolchildren in Alberta?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the numbers that the member is quoting at the outset of his question are preposterous, and he will soon find out that the numbers are not reflected in truth. There are no poor children; there are poor families from which these children come. Our Minister of Human Services, as you know, has a very wide program of services that is available to children and families in need. As a matter of fact, I do speak with teachers very often, and I do realize that from time to time children do come to school . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I think it's preposterous for this minister to say that there are no poor children or no hungry children in Alberta. That's just ridiculous. Why won't this government establish a zero-tolerance policy for childhood hunger in Alberta?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, you have just seen a prime example of what that member will do with the truth. I never said that there are no children that are not hungry or children that are not poor. I'm saying that these children come from poor families, and the Ministry of Human Services has a whole network of programs designed to support families that are in need. As a matter of fact, the minister just a few minutes ago indicated that

we do have a poverty reduction strategy that leads Albertans towards education, towards employment, and there is assistance that is provided to Albertans who need . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Dr. Taft: Well, then, let's test this minister's knowledge, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister name the program in his department or anywhere in his government that provides dedicated funding to address hunger issues for schoolchildren who are at high risk of hunger? What's the name of that program, and how much does it give?

2:20

Mr. Lukaszuk: As a member of the opposition he should know that. Through the 59 offices throughout the province known as Alberta Works – supports for independence, hon. member, is the name of the program that offers a wide range of financial and other counselling benefits to assist not only the child but also the family of that child, and that system is very well integrated with Education.

Ms Blakeman: Wow. How about hypnotism? That might help.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Centre will not even let me answer that question. I know the answer; they choose not to hear it.

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

Social Assistance Programs

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently released census information from Statistics Canada clearly shows that Alberta experienced a very dramatic population increase of 10.8 per cent over the last five years, virtually unprecedented. Clearly, this shows that our province continues to be a real magnet, the most popular place in all of Canada in which to live, work, and raise a family. My questions are for the Minister of Human Services: given that several of these new Albertans are likely to present some form of social assistance need, what are you doing right now to ensure those needs are being adequately met so that we're not left behind in the dark and neither are they?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, a very important question. It is exciting that people right across this continent, right around the world realize that Alberta is the best place to live, work, and raise their families, and we need them. We're going to be short 114,000 skilled people in our workforce over the next 10 years because we have 19,000 people a year retiring now that the baby boomers are reaching that age. So it's an important opportunity for us, but one of the things we have to recognize is that those people need to know how to access the services that every Albertan has access to through the programs the Minister of Education was just mentioning.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. I'd like to ask the same minister: what measurement or what trackings or what metrics do you have in place to ensure that these programs, these services are being administered properly and that the outcomes sought for are being in fact met so that we're not left in the dark again trying to choose?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the fact that the hon. member mentioned outcomes. Since coming into this ministry, one of the consistent messages that – I've spoken with the 23 per cent of the Alberta civil service that works in this department and helps vulnerable Albertans on a daily basis. What I've said to them is: there are two parameters, the Bible and the Criminal Code. It has to be ethical and moral, and it has to be legal. Within that, rules are for when brains run out. Let's help people get success, and that's what they're trying to do each and every day.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, since we're seeing such increased numbers of people coming into our social assistance programs, aboriginal families being among them obviously, I'd like to know whether or not this minister is stepping up to the plate to ensure that adequate dollars are there to fund those increased needs and those new programs.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will have to wait, as every other member of the House has to wait, until 3:15 to see the budget and make his own judgment about adequate dollars. There are always pressures for resources. But what I can assure the hon. member is that aboriginal people in this province, whether First Nation, Métis, or Inuit, are citizens of this province and deserve the same respect as every other citizen in this province, and we need to work hard to make sure that they have the same socioeconomic status as every other Albertan.

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

Castle-Crown Wilderness Area (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Castle special place designation was supposed to be, quote, a milestone in the preservation of Alberta's natural heritage for future generations. This description comes from this government itself 14 years ago. Fourteen years later Alberta Conservatives are trampling over the interests of thousands of Albertans in order to clear-cut this milestone of natural heritage. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why is your government so committed to choosing the interests of industry over those of community, tourism, wildlife, and the environment?

Mr. Oberle: Well, that's an error, Mr. Speaker. My government is interested in balancing the needs of industry with those of the environment and wildlife, and we will do that in a responsible, sustainable way on all of Alberta's landscapes. There was a public land-use decision made with public input into a management plan, harvesting plan, and ongoing public input opportunities. We're always listening.

Ms Notley: Well, given that the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation identifies the Castle as one of the most biologically significant and threatened areas on the continent and given that clear-cut logging will seriously threaten the future population of grizzly bears as well, why won't the minister stop the attack on this area and end this shameful spectre of government arresting its own citizens for the crime of protecting internationally recognized environmental treasures?

Mr. Oberle: I'll reiterate an earlier point that I made, Mr. Speaker,

and that is that every square inch of this province is an environmental treasure. We provide balanced economic development, and we'll continue to do that. This industry sustains Alberta jobs, Alberta families, Alberta communities. It's done in a responsible way, with wildlife considerations taken well into hand.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that citizens participating in the South Saskatchewan regional land-use plan identified the Castle as critical to water supply and the success of tourism in the region and given that numerous polls show that the vast majority of Albertans living in neighbouring towns and cities support the need to save the Castle, why is this minister and his government so committed to ignoring the legitimate public opinion and preference of Albertans on this important issue?

Mr. Oberle: Well, that's fantastic, Mr. Speaker, that the member raises the South Saskatchewan plan because that's under development right now. If indeed there is significant input and pressure to establish protected areas in the Castle or anywhere else within that basin and . . . [interjection]

The member doesn't want to hear the answer, apparently.

If that is a recommendation of the plan, I'll be the first one there waving the flag. That's a decision made by all Albertans, and I'm willing to support it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No. I think, hon. minister, the member that you were responding to was listening. It was another member.

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

Protection of Vulnerable Albertans

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 23, 2011, 35-year-old David Holmes, a resident of a Calgary group home, suffered severe burns to 20 per cent of his body while being bathed. Two and a half hours passed before he was taken to hospital, where he underwent plastic surgery numerous times before passing away five weeks later. To the Minister of Seniors. According to the investigation report David Holmes suffered similar injuries three or four years before, at which time bathing protocols were supposed to be developed but were not. Why has it taken yet another tragedy for this government to implement the same kind of changes recommended six years ago with the scalding fatality inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From all of us in this Assembly I want to acknowledge the family that went through this tragic incident. It was a difficult time in their lives and a difficult time in the lives of PDD Alberta. I have personally talked to the family. I have personally been very involved in this incident, talked with the PDD chairs in Calgary, and we have put in place procedures that will protect vulnerable Albertans in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, we're all sorry in a death such as this, especially when it's preventable.

What is the minister doing to remedy what is, after all, the root cause of such tragedies: high staff turnover due to poor training and low wages?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the procedures in place across the province with PDD regions are very intense.

There's intense training. We're dealing with vulnerable Albertans, and we're dealing with caregivers that care for their clients. They're dedicated, loving, caring people. To suggest that it's money or anything else that has caused this tragic incident is wrong. This was tragic. It was human error.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, we need to care for the care workers. That was what the question was all about.

When will this government commit to closing the gap between contracted out agency pay and government workers?

Mr. VanderBurg: At 3:15 today, sir.

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

Hydraulic Fracturing Practices

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers recently issued hydraulic fracturing operating practices for industry. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What do these practices mean for Albertans?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we welcome these recommendations on hydraulic fracturing because we know they acknowledge what we on the government side know, that Alberta's scarcest resource is not oil. It's not gas. It's water. We will ensure that our water is protected by ensuring that we do have the best hydraulic fracturing practices available today.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: what is being done to deal with the expected growth in the number of hydraulic fracturing operations to ensure the safety of Albertans and our environment?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report to the House that over the past 50 years there have been over 165,000 wells that have been fracked in Alberta, and there is not one proven incident of contamination of surface aquifers. We continue to work with the ERCB, the industry, the agricultural community, and environmental groups to ensure that we do have best practices when it comes to hydraulic fracturing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. A recent poll shows Canadians have concerns about hydraulic fracturing, with some groups calling for a moratorium on the practice. Some provinces, like Quebec, have even halted the process. Does the government have any plans to do the same here in Alberta?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. As I've just indicated, we have an outstanding environmental record when it comes to hydraulic fracturing, and there's no need for a moratorium. What we do need and what we have is a regulatory regime that keeps up with new technologies and best practices, and we're committed to keeping that.

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

Provincial Budget

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government wants to raise taxes. Yesterday the Finance minister made it perfectly clear that Albertans do not need to know what taxes they'll be paying until after the next election. With record revenues nearing \$40 billion, yet another year of billion-dollar deficits is expected to be announced later today. It's clear that the political zombie of Don Getty's deficit spending is back in the Premier's office. To the Finance minister: does he seriously intend to pass this budget and not tell Albertans who is going to pay for all the wasteful spending until after the next election?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we definitely intend to pass the budget. That's about all I agree with in that particular question. We did consult with Albertans extensively, and it was Albertans who had tremendous input into crafting this budget. I just ask the member to be just a little more patient. In about another hour he'll find out whether or not his bogeyman theory of tax increases is coming to fruition.

Mr. Hinman: This is déjà vu of the superboard, not knowing the changes that are coming that are foundational.

Given that much of the free world, in this government's own words, is going through trying times because of a legacy of borrowing and deficit spending, can the Finance minister please explain to Albertans how billion-dollar deficits during record revenues is smart spending?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to address the first part of the question, which was around the Alberta Health Services Board. I was doing a little googling yesterday, and I was on the website of the *Airdrie Echo*. Hopefully, I'll get a chance to print off the article, and I'll table it in the House. It was an article by the member of the Legislature for Airdrie-Chestermere, who was glowingly talking about what a good decision that was, so maybe he might want to have a chat with his partner over there.

Mr. Hinman: There are many members whose eyes are being opened and they're shifting, and there will be more Albertans that will be shifting in the next election.

To the Finance minister: seeing how you don't know what smart spending is and given that your current results-based budgeting is clearly not sustainable and jeopardizes the future prosperity of our province, does the Premier truly expect Albertans to trust her and her government with the strategy of spend now and guess who is paying later?

Mr. Liepert: I think I heard the member refer to shifty. If that's what he was referring to, then I think that we know who's shifty in this particular Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

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

Online Exploitation of Children

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children everywhere deserve to live in a safe, secure environment, free of fear and certainly free of sexual exploitation. Unfortunately, Internet service providers, known as ISPs, currently retain Internet records for only a very short time, making it very difficult for law enforcement agencies to access those records as they fight to keep children safe from online sexual exploitation. My questions are to

the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What is Alberta's position when it comes to the preservation time of these records?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This member does ask a very good question. Although it is a matter of federal jurisdiction, we would like to see in this province a 90-day retention policy. It often takes a long time to get a warrant against one of these child predators, and I thank the member for that question.

Ms Woo-Paw: As we all know, the Internet crosses geographic boundaries, with online child predators in another province or country causing harm to children and families here in Alberta. Is anything being done in that regard?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I just want to advise this member and this House and the people watching today that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General and I a couple of weeks ago attended a federal, provincial, and territorial Justice ministers' meeting in Charlottetown. I had the opportunity to meet with Vic Toews, who is the federal solicitor general, and I'm pleased to advise that he does agree with our proposal, as did every one of the Justice ministers and solicitors general across the entire country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. To the same minister: what about privacy issues surrounding this data retention?

Mr. Denis: The member again raises an important issue about privacy. Mr. Speaker, when we're dealing with privacy, we always need a privacy impact assessment, but I will leave that up to the federal minister to go and deal with these particular details. I want to make it clear that we are not seeking any additional powers of search and seizure. We think that the current power of getting a warrant through a judge is appropriate, but often police have difficulty obtaining this information just because of the current shorter retention period.

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

Twinning of Highway 63

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The throne speech points to energy as critical to our prosperity, but highway 63, the road to the land of prosperity, is an unsafe and scary two-lane road on which travelling Albertans are dying in accidents. In fact, this highway is often referred to as Slaughter Alley, the Highway of Death, or Suicide 63, not just in Alberta but across the country. To the Minister of Transportation. Where there's a will, there a way, Minister. Will this minister provide the resources and the leadership necessary to get this deadly highway twinned before 2015 and not just as fast as possible?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this government has been committed to highway 63 and the twinning of highway 63. We continue to put money into the budget to ensure that that completion takes place as quickly as possible. If the hon. member opposite stays for the budget, he will see exactly what's going to happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: given that highway 63 carries literally the heaviest and the largest loads ever transported by highway, will this minister help workers and their families by improving road safety and focusing on actually twinning it, not just building overpasses in Fort McMurray?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we look at the highways, for sure, in Alberta, and we want to make sure that we're working towards the needs of all Albertans. This is about ensuring that we're doing the right work in the right places. We need to build the Stoney Trail. We need to build the Anthony Henday. We need to build highway 63. We also need to build the bridges and the twinning in Fort McMurray. It is about balance.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about twinning this highway by 2015.

To the minister again: given that all of the PC leadership hopefuls said yes to fast-tracking the twinning of highway 63 only six short months ago and given that the Alberta Liberals say yes to fast-tracking the twinning, will the minister finally say yes to saving lives by fast-tracking this vital road to Alberta's prosperity?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure where the hon. member is coming from because it very much sounds like he's saying yes to every highway that's necessary in Alberta without any conscience to budget. We have made a commitment to the Wood Buffalo area and to the oil sands development that highway 63 is a priority for this government, and it will remain a priority.

The Speaker: That concludes the question period, then, for today. Seventeen members were recognized today, with 102 questions and responses.

We are going to continue the Routine with introductions. We still have a very long list to deal with, so patience, please.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Blackett: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand and introduce my guests to you and through you to this House: Mr. Glen Furtado and Kelly Yuzdepski. Both are representatives of CIMA, which is a multinational engineering consulting firm. Kelly is the vice-president of transportation here in Alberta, and Glen is the regional manager for transportation in southern Alberta and B.C. Glen is also a friend, a constituent, a neighbour, and also the president of the Tuscany Community Association. Like many thousands of volunteers across our great province he makes sure that we build stronger, safer communities by giving his time selflessly. I'd like to have them both rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:40

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you two of my constituents, who I hope are still seated in the members' gallery. Jacqueline Biollo is a mother, she's an active community volunteer, she's a two-term

councillor for the town of Beaumont, and she's vice-president of towns for the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. She's also completing her MBA at this time.

Also in the members' gallery is Mr. Ken Kobly. Mr. Kobly is a former councillor and a four-term mayor for the town of Beaumont. He's currently the executive director of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask my guests to rise and receive the warm traditional greeting of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an introduction to make. I'd like to introduce to you and to the House Mr. Graham Fletcher and Ralph Henderson. I don't know whether they have arrived or not. They are here for the budget. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a lifelong resident of Medicine Hat. Mr. Darren Hirsch is joining us today. He is a good, strong supporter of his community. As a matter of fact, he's here in his capacity of coach of a ringette team that's competing in the Alberta Winter Games. His career is long and varied. He started out as a social worker working for a social service agency in Medicine Hat. Currently he is working as an account manager with Toronto Dominion Canada Trust. He's also served for a term on Medicine Hat city council. Recently he added one more job to his resumé, from my perspective a very important one and I'm sure for members of the House. He's the newly nominated PC candidate for Medicine Hat in the next provincial election. I wish him all the very best.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you on behalf of myself and also the hon. Member for Red Deer-North guests that are with us today. In the gallery we have Lawrence Lee, who is the chairman of the Red Deer public school board; Donna Purcell, who is the president of the Alberta Civil Trial Lawyers Association; Tim Creedon, who is the executive director of the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce; and a close personal friend of mine, Allen Evaniew from Brownlee Law. I'd ask my guests to rise and receive the recognition and welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's pretty rare that I get a constituent to come visit me, so it's a happy day for me today. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of mine from Calgary-Foothills who has come here today to watch the proceedings in the House. Ms Robyn Moser is a realtor in Calgary and recently obtained the status of one of the top 1 per cent of realtors in all of Canada. She also reached an impressive pinnacle of obtaining over 1,000 friends on the social media Facebook, so that's pretty impressive, I think. She and her husband, Clint, are good friends of mine, and I ask that Robyn please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members today two guests who will be no stranger to many members of this Assembly, Bob and Roberta Giffin. Many members will know Mr. Giffin is the former chief of staff to Premier Lougheed. Bob and Roberta are important volunteers and advisers to me in my role as MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford. I'd like to ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of my colleagues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a constituent of mine from Highwood, Scott Tannas. Tannas, of course, is a well-known name in this Assembly, certainly the MLA for Highwood for many years. He was Deputy Speaker and kept your chair warm for a while, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker. Scott was and is a very successful entrepreneur in Highwood and Alberta and, indeed, western Canada. Scott and his wife were born and raised in High River – at least, I assume his wife was, but Scott was for sure – where he continues to reside with Taryn and their four children. But most importantly maybe, Scott Tannas is a candidate for the Senate whom I certainly support and encourage anyone in this House today to support. Scott, I'd like you to rise and get the usual warm welcome from this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure and an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two very close friends of mine who are here to witness what I believe is the future direction for our province. The first is a gentleman by the name of Brad Ferguson, who is the president of Strategy Summit as well as having been very involved with our rural development fund as well as involved with the YPO, the Young Presidents' Organization, and a long list of other volunteer initiatives that he and his family have been involved with for a long, long time. He is also an avid hockey player every Friday morning, which is something I wish I still could do. He's also a very proud dad of a great family.

As well, accompanying him is another close friend of mine, a constituent, Colonel Kevin Weidlich, who has served several tours overseas, including Bosnia and Afghanistan. He has also done a lot of international trade. I've worked with him there. I had the pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to serve with Colonel Weidlich when he was a lowly second lieutenant in the Loyal Edmonton Regiment.

I am extremely pleased that they are both here and that they are in the gallery today to witness what I believe is history for Alberta. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Patty Dittrick from my constituency, who is here with us today. Patty is the president of the Public School Boards' Association, and we would have to look far and wide to find anybody more dedicated or passionate in the pursuit of looking after the children of this province. Please, Patty, would you rise and receive the greetings of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you three friends and constituents I

see up in the members' gallery. Rick Cherniwchan is a good friend who lives out in the Smoky Lake-Waskatenau area and is a councillor with the county of Smoky Lake, and Bob and Mabel Dick are from Athabasca. Bob is a former secretary-treasurer of the school board, and Mabel is an advocate in the community for health care and is really involved in the auxiliary at the hospital there. They're also good friends and advisers. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce a constituent of mine who's here from Edmonton-Mill Creek, Mr. Major Bhullar. He's well known in our community as a very wonderful and generous human being who participates in so many community fundraisers, and for that I'd like to say thank you and welcome him here and have all of you join me in saying thank you to him as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the great privilege of introducing to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very good friend of mine and a very important member of our community, the president of Red Deer College, Joel Ward. Joel is a dynamic leader in our community with a grand vision for our college, and he's a dedicated member as well because he is working very hard to compete with me in a dance competition in honour of the Hospice gala in Red Deer. I would ask Joel to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Education, did you catch my eye?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Obviously I caught your eye. How could I not, Mr. Speaker? [interjections] You ask a question; you get an answer. This is education.

The Speaker: Do proceed with your introduction.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you it is indeed an honour and a pleasure to introduce two gentlemen who are quite an inspiration to our immigrant community not only in Edmonton but throughout Alberta. One is Mr. Alex Davidoff. Mr. Davidoff through his project is going to enhance the skyline of Edmonton by providing what I would suggest to you are class 1 residential condos in downtown. He is here with us today in the members' gallery. With him is a dear friend and another gentleman of immigrant origin who has become very successful in the business community. If you ever are interested in East Indian food, that is the restaurant to go to. His name is Mr. Raj Saunders. I would ask both of these gentlemen to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Okay. I'm going to try that again. Hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, you caught my eye. [interjections]

Ms Tarchuk: Oh, Mr. Speaker, I'm speechless. Thank you very much. I'm really pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature one of Banff-Cochrane's great community leaders, Mr. Ron Casey. He's sitting up in the members' gallery. Ron is currently the mayor of Canmore. He has provided years of good service to our residents. He also happens

to be the recently nominated PC candidate for Banff-Cochrane, so congratulations, Ron. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Have I missed anyone?

Mr. Marz: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of catching someone's eye, my first wife just caught my eye in the members' gallery. She has been my first wife for 46 years, and if my luck holds out, she'll be my last. I would ask my wife, Jan, to rise and receive the warm welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Alex Youth Health Bus

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's known that high-risk youth often neglect their medical needs. Troubled young people often don't have support around them to seek medical services. They may feel like there is no one to trust, or they may not even be aware of the health issue.

At Forest Lawn high school in my constituency of Calgary-Fort our Premier has recently helped launch a medical clinic on wheels dedicated to addressing the needs of youth at risk. The Alex youth health bus works as a mobile, two-room medical clinic staffed by a physician, a nurse, and a community social worker servicing eight Calgary high schools. This is unique and the first of its kind in Canada.

This is the second Alex bus. The first Alex health bus focused on giving medical care and services to the homeless in 2002. The Alex partnership with the Calgary board of education will bring medical attention and education to hundreds of youth who may have otherwise been left behind.

I applaud this initiative from the Alex, an organization which has served Calgary with effective solutions to address the health and social needs of the community for almost 40 years. I'm pleased with the government funding to these good causes, where our tax dollars are effectively used.

I also want to thank our Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Service Alberta for being at the event in my constituency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

GPS Tracking Devices for Disabled Children

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. GPS required. It isn't just 10-year-old Emily who requires a GPS tracking support device due to her autism and a host of other not easily observable developmental disabilities. The Alberta government, when it comes to acting in the best interests of Alberta's children, has lost its way. This government badly needs such a tracking device to find both its own heart and its head. Emily's mother, Alison, has been refused government support on numerous previous occasions, including funding for a service dog, which has provided immeasurable help to children with developmental disabilities and their families attempting to cope with tremendous disruptions in their lives.

Setting aside the heart or ethical argument, Alison has repeatedly, to denying, closed government ears, put forward the logical-head argument. Numerous professionals, including medical doctors, psychologists, educational authorities, and law

enforcement officials, have noted in unanimous agreement how important the GPS device is to ensuring Emily's well-being. However, this penny-wise, pound-foolish government would rather pay out thousands of dollars denying the obvious need for keeping track of Emily through a lengthy and unnecessarily complicated and ridiculously expensive hearing process than fund this absolutely necessary life-saving tracking device.

Central to the successful resolution of this matter is how this government views Alberta's children. Are Emily and the thousands of other developmentally delayed Alberta children worthy of investment, or will the Alberta government continue to write them off as liabilities, damaged goods not worthy of expenditure? Since originally writing this appeal to both the Premier and the Minister of Human Services two weeks ago, I have not received a reply. The hearing into the necessity of a tracking device to protect Emily did not take place as the costs for the expert witnesses to testify on Emily's behalf would have had to be borne at the family's expense.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Cabinet Tour Visit to Edmonton-Calder

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is interesting, particularly to me, that the most common first name in this Assembly is Doug. There are three of us. Recently our Premier and our cabinet members, including my two namesake colleagues, came together in Edmonton-Calder to listen to the concerns of the folks at the Rosedale seniors' residence. Over 300 seniors, families, and community leaders gathered to talk to our Premier about her values, beliefs, and visions for what Alberta can and should be. Critics, those who know the price of everything and the value of nothing, were brazen to suggest that my constituents did not deserve the attention they received on the cabinet tour. From the luncheon to the question-and-answer session people were engaged and approved of the direction of this province under the stewardship of our Premier and her cabinet.

Our seniors, my seniors, who reside in any of the 10 complexes in Edmonton-Calder, expect to see their representatives. They expect to know the real intentions of the government and see proof of what we are doing. The sky is clearly not falling in Edmonton-Calder, Mr. Speaker. We're opening a 200-bed DAL facility later this month as well as 58 units of subsidized apartments. Construction is also under way for a new life-lease complex, and a new medical clinic in Kensington is advertising for 2,000 patients. That particular facility, in case you're wondering, is in fact on the north side.

This progressive, tangible benefit is a real-life example of this government listening and responding to the needs of Albertans. I would like to express my deep appreciation to our Premier, cabinet ministers, and MLA colleagues who came once again to my constituency. They shared their wisdom, friendship, and, most importantly, their time with the residents of the Rosedale seniors' residence. No one asked, "Why are you not listening?" because very clearly, Mr. Speaker, we are.

Thank you.

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

The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would ask the unanimous consent of the House to continue the Routine today, particularly in light of the fact that the private

members' bills that would be debated on Monday have yet to be introduced, and we would need to continue the Routine to allow that to happen. I hope that we will have the support of the House for unanimous consent to continue the Routine.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's a request to waive Standing Order 7(7). The request is that we waive it, continue the Routine.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Okay. We're now going to have a recess till 3:15 so that we can prepare the Assembly for the Budget Address by the Minister of Finance.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

Orders of the Day Transmittal of Estimates

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have received certain messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2012, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

The hon. Deputy Premier and President of Treasury Board and Enterprise.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a second, or subsequent, set of estimates is to be tabled for a fiscal year, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires an update to the fiscal plan. I now wish to table the 2011-12 third-quarter fiscal update, which serves as the amended fiscal plan, and the 2011-12 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. As I speak to you now, this fiscal update is being made public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act. These supplementary estimates will provide additional spending authority to eight departments of the government and one office of the Legislative Assembly. When passed, the estimates will authorize increases of approximately \$97.6 million in voted expense and \$3.1 million in expense and capital investment. These estimates will also authorize transfers of \$30 million of previously approved capital investment to expense.

Government Motions

4. Mr. Horner moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2011-12

supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

5. Mr. Horner moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2011-12 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

The Speaker: This is not a debatable motion, hon. members, so I'll call the question.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Government Motion 6, agreed to by the Assembly on February 8, 2012, I wish to table the 2012-13 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2012-13 government estimates.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I am tabling the government business plan, titled the Government Strategic Plan, as required by section 7 of the Government Accountability Act and the ministry business plans as required by section 13 of the same act.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the government's Budget 2012 fiscal plan, which contains the consolidated fiscal plan as required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act and the consolidated capital plan as required under section 7.1 of the same act.

3:20

Budget Address

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

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pleasure and tremendous pride that I rise in the Assembly today to deliver the 2012 Alberta budget. It is somewhat bittersweet, though, because this will be the first and only budget that I'll have the privilege of presenting in the House because like you I've chosen to not stand as a candidate in the next provincial election. So I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my constituents of Calgary-West for their support over the past seven and a half years, including a couple who are seated in the members' gallery. It has been a great honour to represent these fine, hard-working Albertans, an honour for which I am sincerely grateful.

I also want to extend my best wishes to all of my colleagues on both sides of the House. Whether they are choosing to seek re-election or to follow another path, I wish them all the greatest of success.

In addition to being a personal milestone for me, this is also the last budget, Mr. Speaker, that will be delivered in a session over which you will preside. Let me say what a privilege it's been to serve with you. I'm sure I speak for all fellow members when I say that the Assembly will not be the same without you. [Standing ovation]

Mr. Speaker, I'd also be remiss if I didn't take this moment to recognize two special guests who are in your gallery. There are two former provincial treasurers in this Assembly, the hon. Lou Hyndman and the hon. Jim Dinning. If I could ask both of them if they would stand and be recognized by the House.

This is also the first budget, Mr. Speaker, that will be delivered under the leadership of our new Premier. I'm sure that most Albertans share my view that an awful lot has changed in the past hundred days or so since our Premier was sworn in. As Finance minister I can tell you that one thing that is definitely changing is our approach to government and how we manage Albertans' tax dollars.

One need look no further than the uncertainty that is affecting so many European countries to see that the modern global economy is not well served by old assumptions and old ways of doing things. Even the United States, long regarded as the world's greatest free-market success story, once again is nearing its debt ceiling, which is now more than \$16.4 trillion. That's a number so large that it's difficult to even relate to.

Here in Canada the economic recovery is under way, but it's taking longer than the federal government had anticipated. My federal counterpart is now projecting a balanced budget in 2015-16. While the federal government's balancing act of fiscal prudence should be applauded, the fact of the matter is that under this timetable more than another \$100 billion will be added to the federal debt before the books are balanced. Ontario, Canada's most populous province, is now projecting a balanced budget in 2017-18. Between now and then another \$51 billion will be added to its debt burden.

Now, by comparison, Albertans can take great pride and comfort in our fiscal situation. We, of course, have no debt that is not covered by cash reserves. The losses that our province suffered during the recession have all been regained. Between 2008 and 2009 Alberta lost some 28,000 jobs, but by June of last year all of those jobs had been recovered plus additional new ones created. In fact, in the month of June last year the Alberta economy created more jobs than were created in the entire United States of America.

While unemployment is a major concern in other parts of the world, Alberta leads the nation in the creation of new jobs. Employment growth in Alberta was 3.8 per cent last year, by far the highest rate in the country. In fact, Alberta accounted for about half of all of the new jobs that were created in Canada in 2011. And while employers in other jurisdictions are contemplating layoffs or downsizing, businesses in Alberta are beginning to worry about the availability of skilled workers and potential labour shortages.

Another area that we've seen a positive turnaround in is the energy sector. I'll give you an example. Land lease sales grew by \$1.2 billion in 2009-10 to a forecasted record level of \$3.3 billion this year, and the budget projects that over \$2 billion will be gained in land sales in 2012-13. This points to the tremendous confidence that exists in Alberta's economy.

I must say, however, that our provincial budgeting is not without its challenges. In 2008-09 natural gas revenues were \$5.8 billion. In the upcoming fiscal year it's estimated that natural gas revenues will be \$1.2 billion, or about one-fifth of what they were just four years ago.

Another example is the strong value of the Canadian dollar. In 2012-13 for every 1-cent increase in the exchange rate over the course of 12 months the province will receive \$247 million less in revenue, and our forecast for the upcoming fiscal year is that the dollar will remain almost at par. So for us as Albertans the lesson is clear, but it's also an opportunity. We must put aside the old

ways and equip our province to reach its full potential so we can succeed in the new global economy. We must protect the advantages that Albertans have worked so hard to achieve such as strong public services, low taxes, and no operating debt. We must identify what our priorities are and act boldly and decisively to make the most of our opportunities, and we must invest in our greatest resource, our people.

So it was Albertans themselves that we turned to when we began crafting this budget. Last November the President of Treasury Board and I travelled across the province, meeting with a broad cross-section of Albertans to get their input as to what were the most important things to them. Albertans also participated in this process through an online survey, polling, written submissions, and town hall meetings. What we heard from Albertans across the province was remarkably consistent and could be categorized into three priority areas: investing in families and communities, securing Alberta's economic future, and advancing world-leading resource stewardship.

Members of the Assembly will notice that instead of being organized by department, Budget 2012 is organized along these priorities. We focused on things that we need to do and not which department is doing them. Presenting our budget this way is sharing openly with Albertans what we propose to do and standing accountable for the outcomes that we achieve.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is forecast to grow by a healthy 3.8 per cent this year, and that's up from 3.5 per cent in 2011. Considering the impact the global economic slowdown is having in other jurisdictions, Albertans are very fortunate indeed to be experiencing such growth. Revenues for the upcoming budget year are forecast at \$40.3 billion, an increase of \$1.8 billion, or about 4.6 per cent, from 2011-12. It is the first time in history that our projected revenues are to exceed \$40 billion.

Now, the good news is that revenues are forecast to keep growing by an average of 10.4 per cent over the following two years, reaching \$49 billion in 2014-15. Increasing revenues are mainly due to higher income tax revenue because of the strength of our economy and higher resource revenues. I need to point out for members of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, that these higher tax revenues are the result of Albertans and Alberta corporations doing better and thus having higher taxable incomes, and not because of any tax rate increases by the province. In fact, Budget 2012 introduces no new taxes or tax rate increases.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I also need to note that in the year 2014-15 Alberta will receive an additional billion dollars as a result of equitable health transfers from the federal government. This is an inequity that our province has been attempting to resolve for some time, and we're pleased that the federal government has moved to a health transfer model that is fair to all provinces.

Our government will impose strict fiscal discipline to ensure that its revenues and expenditures are managed responsibly beginning with Bill 1, which was introduced on Tuesday by our Premier, to mandate results-based budgeting and reviews of all government programs and services. Through this budget we will lay the groundwork for three-year funding cycles for municipalities, school boards, and postsecondary institutions. Stable and predictable funding for these priority areas will allow our partners to plan better for the future, provide better service to Albertans, and offer greater accountability to taxpayers. We'll also challenge government to find ways to achieve the outcomes that Albertans want within existing budgets. We'll scrutinize all costs and challenge automatic growth of spending, assigning funds only where they are needed.

We're forecasting a return to a balanced budget in 2013-14, as our Premier committed, with a projected surplus of nearly \$1 billion. Equally important, Mr. Speaker, by 2014-15 we are forecasting a surplus of \$5.2 billion. The return of surplus budgets will bring with it the opportunity to replenish our savings account, the sustainability fund. If we meet our projected surplus in 2014-15, the fund will increase to \$4.8 billion by the end of that fiscal year.

Budget 2012 will see total government spending rise by a modest 3.3 per cent over last year. The increase is due almost entirely to increased spending in Albertans' priority areas of health, education, and social supports for those who need them. This increase is less than population growth plus inflation. We can afford to spend this much, Mr. Speaker, but we will also be disciplined enough to spend no more.

More than 60 per cent of the operating budget has been allocated to families and communities. This is an increase of approximately 5 per cent from last year's budget. Specifically, base funding to Alberta Health Services will increase by 6 per cent as part of our five-year funding commitment to deliver equitable health services across the province. The Department of Human Services will receive \$2.5 billion.

When you dig into these numbers, you see some very real and positive outcomes for Albertans. One is a \$400 increase immediately in maximum monthly payment benefits for AISH clients. Our Premier made a promise to increase the income provided to severely handicapped Albertans, and Budget 2012 honours that commitment. Budget 2012, Mr. Speaker, also honours another commitment. We will be doubling the employment income exemptions for AISH clients, allowing them to keep more of their benefits while earning income.

Budget 2012 also increases income support benefits by an average of 5 per cent. This will help about 34,000 households in which Albertans are either training or looking for work or are unable to work. At the end of the day these funding increases will make a real difference in the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Government is also investing in health care to provide better access to the health system for all Albertans, no matter where they live. Budget 2012 allocates \$100 million in each of the next three years to help open a new front door to the health system in the form of family care clinics and other measures that support primary care, additions, and mental health programs. This is another promise made by our Premier and another promise kept.

We also have construction continuing this year on the central Alberta cancer centre in Red Deer, with completion expected in the spring of 2013. It will mean that people who used to have to travel to Calgary or Edmonton for radiation treatment will soon be able to get the care they need closer to home, without the added inconvenience and expense at a time when they are already dealing with tremendous challenges.

Likewise, the opening of the new south Calgary health campus this year will make an incredible difference in the lives of Albertans living in our largest city. This will not only impact those living in the south part of our fastest growing city but everyone in the region, as the facility brings new capacity to the health system and takes some of the pressure off of the existing hospitals. Now, we're calling this facility a campus because it will integrate clinical care with education and research. It will also promote wellness and good health and help patients get well in their homes by connecting them with other community services.

While building new and expanded infrastructure is key to enhancing our health care system, so too is operating it. Altogether, Alberta Health Services will receive an additional \$267 million to support new staff and other costs related to running the new

facilities, mainly the south Calgary hospital and the Edmonton clinic south.

This budget, Mr. Speaker, will continue to support programs to help the homeless. This is an area where we've seen tremendous progress. In the first two years of the Housing First program more than 4,800 homeless Albertans have been placed in safe and permanent homes. We expect another 1,800 Albertans to reclaim lives of dignity and independence during the upcoming year.

Budget 2012 continues to support municipalities through the flagship municipal sustainability initiative, more commonly known as MSI, with \$2.8 billion allocated to this program over the next three years. Since this program began in 2007, more than 6,000 capital and operating projects have been accepted in communities all across Alberta.

For our province to continue investing in people, we must diversify our economy and grow our economic pie. This vital work begins in the education system. Budget 2012 increases operating funding for education by 3.4 per cent, to \$6.2 billion. Fourteen new schools will be completed in 2012, and just think of the impact this will have on children and families in some of our fastest growing communities. For some this will be the first time that children have the opportunity to attend a neighbourhood school that is actually in their neighbourhood, Mr. Speaker.

School boards in rapidly growing communities can be assured that their growth is recognized, and boards in remote areas will see that their higher transportation costs are acknowledged. Increases in supports for inclusive education mean that children with extra educational needs will be better supported. Budget 2012, Mr. Speaker, continues last fall's \$107 million funding addition to the education system. This budget also provides an additional 5.1 per cent for student transportation services, as the fuel price contingency program is funded for the full year.

3:40

I want to move on to postsecondary education because Budget 2012 invests heavily in postsecondary education. This is an area where the government has made significant investments in past years. Three major projects are expected to be completed in 2012-13: the University of Alberta's agricultural facilities in Kinsella and St. Albert, SAIT's trades and technology complex, and the phase 2 expansion of Bow Valley College. These facilities, Mr. Speaker, will train thousands of students and provide space for state-of-the-art research to occur.

Now, we're seeing the benefits from previous investments in postsecondary institutions. In the five years between 2005 and 2010 total registered apprentices in Alberta grew by 36 per cent, to more than 63,000. In fact, even though Alberta has only 11 per cent of the country's workforce, we train and hire more than 20 per cent of the country's apprentices.

Our province is a leader both in creating jobs and in training skilled workers to fill them. Budget 2012 will increase operating funding to Alberta's postsecondary institutions by 2 per cent, but it will also increase support for scientific research through an expanded tax credit and boost funding for prion and water research by \$9 million to help find answers to some of the world's most pressing problems.

Securing Alberta's economic future also means investing in infrastructure that enables growth and enhances our quality of life. Over the next three years this government will invest \$16.5 billion in capital infrastructure. Now, while this is a modest decrease of about 7 per cent from the last fiscal year, Alberta still spends some 38 per cent more per capita on crucial infrastructure than any other province, Mr. Speaker, with the exception this year of Newfoundland and Labrador.

For the next three years we'll see the start of construction of the new Royal Alberta Museum. We'll see continued progress on the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads. We'll work on a number of hospitals, regional health centres, and health facilities from Grande Prairie to High Prairie, from Sherwood Park to Medicine Hat, from Bow Island to Edson, and many points in between.

Now, these are all things we're doing within our own province, but in the new global economy Alberta must look far beyond its borders. We must increase our presence and our access to markets in some of the world's fastest growing economies, particularly in Asia. The urgency of this work and the risk involved when relying on a single market was underscored last month when the Keystone XL pipeline project was delayed yet again.

Budget 2012 provides support to make Alberta a preferred global supplier of not only energy but agriculture, forest products, and services. This budget invests about a billion dollars in Agriculture and Rural Development, reflecting our government's continued commitment to building and maintaining our largest renewable industry. These dollars will also ensure that we remain competitive both domestically and globally. This investment includes \$133 million for industry development, food safety, and research. Budget 2012 also supports initiatives to make Alberta a global supplier of forest products and promotes projects that turn forest waste into renewable energy.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is becoming an increasingly visible player on the world stage and will take on an even greater role as we gain better market access for our products. We will build our nation's role as a global energy leader through the development of a Canadian energy strategy. We do this knowing that taking these steps will put our energy production practices and environmental stewardship under even greater scrutiny, but we're not afraid of such scrutiny. We welcome it along with the opportunity to advance the world-leading resource stewardship that was developed and is practised right here in Alberta.

But saying that, we also recognize that we must continually improve our environmental performance and monitoring in a way that is credible, comprehensive, and transparent. Budget 2012 will increase funding for environmental monitoring related to oil sands development in the oil sands region. It also allocates \$540 million in GreenTRIP funding to advance Alberta's leadership in reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with transportation. This funding also helps make public transit more accessible and better connects Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, our government was able to make these investments because of the actions we took over the years to put Alberta on a sound financial footing. Our province worked hard to pay off its accumulated debt and build up the sustainability fund to use in difficult times. So when the recession struck and other jurisdictions were borrowing money to finance economic stimulus programs, Alberta was able to maintain its programs without cutbacks, without raising taxes, and without piling on new debt for operations. While other provinces were going deeper and deeper into debt, Alberta was embarking on one of the largest infrastructure programs in our province's history. Not only did this initiative ensure that 160,000 Albertans were able to keep working and supporting their families, but we also now have the most efficient systems of roads and highways, the most modern schools for our children, the most advanced health facilities, and the best libraries and cultural facilities for all our citizens. This is a lasting legacy for future generations of Albertans.

I'd just like to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, and say that when it comes to modern infrastructure, Albertans can thank our former

Premier, the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, for his leadership. I know all Albertans recognize and appreciate what has taken place in this province over the past half decade.

Mr. Speaker, the approach our province took was the right one for the times. But as the saying goes, the times are a-changin'. Now we need to consider whether our approach needs to change also and whether the fiscal framework we have now is the right one for the future.

During her leadership campaign our Premier raised some important questions, questions we also heard from Albertans in our budget consultations and during the recent cabinet tour, questions like: are we using the best revenue mix to fund the programs that we need? Are we making the wisest spending decisions? Should we be saving more or saving differently? These are questions we need to consider as a province, recognizing that Alberta has unique challenges when it comes to budgeting.

Our province is blessed with abundant natural resources, and in good times those resources translate into abundant revenues. There have been years when Alberta surpluses have been greater than the entire operating budget of some Canadian provinces, but there have also been other years where resource revenues are lower, and we have difficult decisions to make. Now Albertans are telling us that some things, like health and education, are too important to ride the rollercoaster of volatile resource revenues. They're asking if we can do better, and I say today: we can.

We need to take a look at our fiscal framework. We need to take a look at where and how we collect revenues, where and how we spend, and where and how we save. These are the foundations of our fiscal framework. As His Honour said when he delivered the Speech from the Throne two days ago, we need to change this foundation to put our province on a solid footing for the future. So over the next year our government will open the discussion with Albertans on how best to do this. Over the coming years we'll lead a shift towards a new fiscal framework that will serve Albertans better.

Now, the first challenge will be building a more predictable, sustainable revenue base to support ongoing programs. For too long we've used our resource revenues to pay for our day-to-day expenses. These revenues rise and fall with global economic fluctuations, fluctuations that we cannot predict and we sure can't control. It's not wise to rely on such a volatile revenue base to pay for essential services that we need and use every day, nor is it fair to our children and grandchildren to spend our whole inheritance of natural resource revenues, because it also belongs to them.

3:50

I believe Albertans understand that we can't continue to rely on energy revenues in the same way in the future that we have in the past. They know that we must progressively become less reliant on these revenues to fund ongoing programs, and they also know that as Albertans we enjoy the lowest overall tax regime among all the provinces with a personal tax rate of 10 per cent and the highest personal exemptions in the country. What this does is keep more money in Albertans' pockets.

When you compare Alberta to other provinces, Albertans pay at least \$11 billion less annually in personal and corporate tax, and that will continue to be the case. Alberta will maintain the lowest overall corporate and small-business tax burden in Canada, and Budget 2012 makes no changes to Alberta's tax structure or rates. We will continue to have, Mr. Speaker, the lowest fuel tax, no payroll tax, no capital tax, and, yes, no sales tax.

As we move away from volatile resource revenues to fund ongoing programs and move toward a more sustainable revenue base, we know that a discussion on taxes must lie in Alberta's

future. This discussion will involve all Albertans and all sectors of the Alberta economy, and it will be based on the premise that while the tax system may change, one thing that must not change is Alberta's tax advantage. Alberta's low tax regime is one of the things that sets our province apart, and it gives us a competitive edge that must be preserved.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, putting a budget together is about more than dollars and cents. It's about ensuring that government is supporting the outcomes that Albertans want to achieve for themselves and their families. It's about investing in people and in the things that are important to Albertans such as health, education, jobs, services for seniors and the vulnerable, infrastructure, and our children's future. It's about protecting the advantages Albertans have worked so hard to build, not only first-rate services and modern infrastructure but also a clean balance sheet and low taxes. It's about keeping the commitments our Premier and our government have made. Budget 2012 does all of those things.

It invests in Alberta's priorities, our people, while returning to a balanced budget next year without raising taxes. This budget also signals important work that we must do to move Alberta towards a new fiscal framework, one that will increase stability and predictability in government revenues and bring spending under more scrutiny and greater discipline than ever before.

With Alberta's economy heating up and the province poised to return to surpluses, this is the time to ensure that government is providing the right services in the most efficient way possible while putting our long-term revenues and savings strategies on sounder footing. This is the budget which is the start of what we want to accomplish in the coming three years and what we will strive to achieve over the next 10 years. The steps that we take today will bring us closer to our goals.

Mr. Speaker, I said at the outset of my remarks that presenting this budget was a milestone for me, and indeed it is. I believe it's also a milestone for our province as we take those first steps to building a new fiscal foundation, one that protects our hard-won advantages while arming Alberta for success in the new global economy and helping us reach our full potential.

Our government worked very hard to build this budget based on what we've heard from Albertans. I believe it's the right budget for Alberta today. It is a responsible budget. Presenting it to this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, has been an honour and a privilege, and I look forward to debating it in the coming days.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister of Finance for presenting the budget. We shall miss him. The Official Opposition and other opposition parties are very much looking forward to the debate. On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition I would beg leave to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance on a wonderful budget, and I would move that the Assembly do now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on February 13.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:55 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 5th Session (2012)

Activity to February 09, 2012

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

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1 Results-based Budgeting Act (Redford)

First Reading -- 4 (Feb. 7 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 31-38 (Feb. 8 aft., adjourned)

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