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The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 5a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 27th Legislature

Fifth Session

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Rodney
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Swann
Woo-Paw

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 14, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

To all of you: happy, happy Valentine's.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of myself and my colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three persons who are in your gallery. Dr. Tracy Edwards is president of the Lethbridge College. Under her leadership the college has made tremendous strides into the future. One example is the training of the wind turbine technicians who work all over the world. The college is now very comprehensive and goes well beyond the old name of Lethbridge community college. Mr. Randy Jespersion is the very dedicated chair of our board of governors, and another hard-working friend of Lethbridge College who really needs no introduction to this House is Mr. David Coutts. Please rise and receive the greetings of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today, being an MLA from Calgary, to tell you that we have some very special visitors in the gallery that I'd like to introduce through you to everyone in his House, and that's 104 students from the Calgary Science School in my constituency. That's an awful lot of students, so some are here now, and some will be here later. They're here with their teachers, Candice Shaw, Jason Publack, Rick Fawcett, and Carolyn Armstrong; and also a number of parent helpers, Stuart McPhail, Kim Siemens, Adelina Banks, Bernadine Martin, Paul Langille, Pat Lipovski, Lorelee Higgins, Denise Ronsky, and a good friend of mine, Mr. Scott Blasken. I'd like everyone here to give them a rousing introduction and welcome. Thank you so much for being here.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you as well today visitors to our Legislature, some special visitors from Victory Christian school located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're a group of 13 grade 9 students accompanied by their teacher, Jonathan Tomalty. I met with them earlier, and we had a question-and-answer session. I can assure you that they're a bright young group of students. They're learning a lot about the parliamentary system. They will be joining us in the public gallery, and I'd ask the members to give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you a group of hard-working staff from Infrastructure's properties division. These staff do a terrific job each and every day helping to manage government buildings all over the province. I see that they're up in the public gallery behind us: Alana Krakowski, Stephanie Hassard, Stacey Mah, Kelly Lemke, Max Amodio, Wayne Widuk, Sherry Shagidevich, Jacques Requier, Norene Tchir, and Fred Nyanzi. I'd ask these folks to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must beg your indulgence. I have a large list of guests today in the Legislature, and they are here to witness our tabling of Bill 2, the new Alberta Education Act. These are all Alberta's partners in education. If I may start with Jacquie Hansen, president of the Alberta School Boards Association, also accompanied by Cheryl Smith, vice-president, and David Anderson, executive director, who are here representing all of the school boards in the province of Alberta.

The Alberta Teachers' Association is represented by Carol Henderson, the president. I am so glad to know that Ms Henderson is here with us. Welcome. She is accompanied by Dennis Theobald, associate executive secretary of the Alberta Teachers' Association, representing all of the teachers doing the fine work in our province. From our Alberta School Councils' Association, representing all of the parents in the province of Alberta, is Marilyn Sheptycki, president, accompanied by Michele Mulder, executive director. Welcome.

The Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, representing, obviously, all of the public schools, is represented by Patty Dittrick, president, and Mary Lynne Campbell, executive director. The Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association is represented today by Mr. Tony Sykora, president, and also Stefan Michniewski, executive director. The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools is represented today by Mr. Jim Rigby, co vice-president, and Lee Lucente, past co vice-president. Welcome. The Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones de l'Alberta is represented by Gérard Lavigne. Welcome as well.

The College of Alberta School Superintendents, representing all of the administrators in our province, is represented by Roger Nippard, president, and Barry Litun, past president. Also with us today, Mr. Speaker, is the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta represented by David Eifert, vice-president, and Duane Plantinga, executive director. Also with us are education staff representing all of the support staff such as teaching assistants and others in our schools, represented by Wilma Ellenburgh, president of CEP local 52-A Edmonton Catholic Support Staff Association, and Danny Burrell, school support staff employee liaison officer. Welcome as well.

Mr. Speaker, representing our students is the minister's advisory council, comprised of Ariana Cahn, Gabrielle Fournell, Emily Marriot, Kelly Thompson, Joshua Au-Yeung, Fatima Hawa, Brittany Lissinna, Bethany Froese, Breanne Fulawka, Julie Carter, and representing Alberta Education staff, Kelley Beitel.

I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't introduce one more partner in education, very important to me personally— and he just happens to be in the gallery today as well — my grade 8 social studies teacher, Mr. Chuck Grelli, who must think that this is rather surreal if he remembers me from school days. I'd like him to rise as well.

Welcome to you all.

The Speaker: Nobody beyond grade 8, Minister? [laughter]
The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a close personal friend of mine, Mr. Kevin Pizzey. Kevin has taught school in Sylvan Lake for 23 years and is currently the president of Chinook's ATA local 17, comprised of approximately 700 teachers. Over the years Kevin and I have worked on a number of projects together to further the interest of public education in Alberta. We would mention Motion 503. Kevin has also been an active member of the PC Party for over 10 years and is well known by many in this Assembly. I would like him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce Barb Noble, who is very active in her community and is the manager of the Edmonton office of the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Last year alone the Heart and Stroke Foundation invested close to \$60 million in research, which funded almost 1,500 researchers across Canada. Since 1956 the total is more than \$1.2 billion. I will share more on the foundation in my member's statement today, but in the meantime I invite all of our colleagues to join us in welcoming Barb to the Legislature today.

Thank you.

1:40

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you Dr. Ansar Qureshi. Dr. Qureshi has been working in Alberta as an environmental microbiologist for the past 25 years, with a focus on public health. Dr. Qureshi has an impressive resumé, including serving as a past director of the Capital region health board, past president of the Pakistan-Canada Association as well as serving on a number of community and public boards. Dr. Qureshi has also recently taken on the role of president of the soon to be formed Edmonton-South West PC association. He is very proud of having two boys and one girl. At this time I'd ask my guest to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

For my second introduction, Mr. Speaker, also in attendance is Naida Meghji, the child development manager at the Joan Ivany Allen Gray Child Development Centre. She has over 16 years of experience in child care and is continually striving for excellence in child development. If her name sounds familiar, it may be because of her family's connection to Platinum Investments, a major player in the EIA's expansion Marriott hotel. Her work with children and being a mom to two sons keeps her very, very busy. At this time I'd ask my guest to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very special afternoon for the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you Mr. Sohail Quadri, the newly nominated and official PC Party candidate in the next provincial election for my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. The Edmonton-Mill Woods PC Association has spoken, and through the unanimous vote held last January 31 we now have an

official PC Party candidate for this great part of southeast Edmonton. I would now ask Mr. Quadri, who is seated in the public gallery, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is also a member of the Edmonton-Mill Woods PC Association. I would ask Mr. Farooq Jutt, who is seated in the public gallery, to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Peter Menzies and Marc Patrone. Peter is currently the CRTC representative for Alberta and is someone who I've known for a very long time. Previously he has been an editor and publisher for the *Calgary Herald* and even before that was a member of the Legislative Assembly press gallery. Marc is currently the national commissioner for the CRTC, following his career as an experienced broadcast journalist who worked nationally with CTV and internationally with CNN and ESPN. With all of the things these men have been through, I consider it quite the honour that they would actually spend the afternoon in here watching us. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly our guest Casey McCarthy. Casey is an AISH activist, heavily involved with the Self Advocacy Federation, the Special Olympics, and countless other organizations. Until recently she was also a constituent of mine. I would now ask Casey to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly our guests from various organizations fighting to preserve the natural heritage of the Castle wilderness area. Chelsea Flook, Gabriel Cárdenas, Nicholas Mickelsen, and Sarah Elmeligi have all come here today from different parts of the province to help stop the government's attack on one of the most biologically significant and threatened natural areas in North America. The Alberta NDP would continue to stand with these organizations like CPAWS and the Sierra Club Canada to help preserve and protect our province's natural heritage for future generations.

I would now like to ask my guests to rise as I call their names: Chelsea Flook, who is with the Sierra Club Canada; Gabriel Cárdenas, who is with the concerned citizens and is a community organizer; Nicholas Mickelsen, who is with the New Democratic Youth association; and Sarah Elmeligi, who is with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. I'd like the whole Legislature to join me in welcoming them.

Members' Statements

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

Heart Month

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today we celebrate Valentine's Day, and this month we commemorate Heart Month. Throughout February organizations such as the Heart and

Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT & Nunavut will be raising awareness of the risks of heart disease and informing Albertans that heart disease is preventable and manageable.

It's estimated that 70,000 Canadians have heart attacks every year. High blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, being overweight, excessive alcohol, physical inactivity, smoking, and stress are all risks that Albertans can address to reduce their chances of developing heart disease in the first place.

Today even our children are at greater risk of developing heart disease. Youth obesity rates are increasing while activity levels are decreasing. In Alberta approximately 22 per cent of children and youth are overweight or obese. Children as young as six are being diagnosed with high blood pressure as well as type 2 diabetes.

These two risks can be significantly reduced with a healthy diet and, of course, a more active lifestyle. The government of Alberta supports the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT & Nunavut in encouraging Albertans to stay healthy and to make wise nutritional choices while increasing activity levels.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of our Assembly to join me in congratulating the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT & Nunavut for raising awareness of heart disease not only during Heart Month but throughout the year as well as for the contributions they've made over time towards achieving their goal of eliminating disability and deaths from heart disease.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Health Care Services in Alberta

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to speak about health care. I spend most of my time talking to the health care workers in the trenches. They talk to me because the government won't listen and they don't trust them. I find it extremely ironic that this government, the Premier and her top ministers specifically, go on and on and on about having discussions and conversations with Albertans, and they won't talk to the health professionals who know a lot more about the number one issue to Albertans, health.

This government doesn't respect the hard work of doctors. The doctors have not had a contract for over a year now. The government keeps breaking off negotiations and playing hardball like cutting funding for primary care networks, a documented success story that helps reduce admissions to hospitals. Does this make sense with the family doctor shortage? Doctors have been intimidated and bullied by this government for years. The health minister has the audacity in question period to call it a workplace issue. The Premier when running indicated that she would call a full public judicial inquiry. Alas, another broken promise.

What is the government doing now? Well, they've found money to hire more vice-presidents at Alberta Health Services. In the last year the number has gone up, from 72 to 89, over 20 per cent. They've also opened a hotline for doctors. I wonder if these new vice-presidents will man that hotline.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for the government to have a real conversation with real people in the trenches and not their closed-door meetings. It's time to end the intimidation. It's time to give the support that they need to the real people that matter, the health care professionals and Albertans.

Oral Question Period

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

Electricity Prices

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, happy Valentine's Day. It's great to see Madam Premier wearing Liberal red colours.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans' power bills are like a box of chocolates. They never know what they're going to get. Yesterday the Minister of Energy told Albertans who want lower prices to pick up the phone and call 11 different providers, and if you're on the regulated rate option, decrease your cost by 42 per cent. Instead of forcing Albertans to make dozens of calls for help after they've been gouged, why doesn't the Premier just make the fixed-term contracts the default option?

1:50

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we're quite proud of the fact that we give residential consumers this choice. It's not very complicated. Albertans every day make a choice when they go to borrow money for a mortgage. Do they want a fixed rate, do they want a variable rate, or do they want some combination? It's exactly the same situation with respect to electricity, and Albertans appreciate that choice.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That wasn't a tasty chocolate, Mr. Minister.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans continue to get gouged by high power bills, and this government won't do anything about it. Given that sky-high electricity prices do the most harm to the vulnerable in our society – those on fixed incomes, seniors, and hard-working families – does the Premier have the heart to tell these Albertans why there is nothing in the PC government's budget to provide any sort of relief from these sky-high bills?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, what we know is that in this province Albertans do have a choice with respect to whether or not they enter into fixed-term contracts. There's certainly not any reason for them to call 11 different providers. They can simply go to a website and get the information, make the decision, call, and sign a contract if they wish. The Minister of Energy is absolutely right. By doing that, they will be able to reduce their cost of electricity 42 per cent.

Now, we know that in a deregulated market sometimes the prices are high; sometimes they're low. We've had the good fortune over the past five years of having significantly lower prices, and that's very important. But with respect to whether or not vulnerable Albertans might need support, that's available. We didn't have to add it to the budget because it's already there.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in other jurisdictions such as British Columbia and Quebec government involvement ensures electricity prices are far less than those set by private power companies right here, will the Premier please show some compassion to Albertans and fix the price gouging happening under this government's flawed policy of electricity deregulation? Yes or no, Madam Premier.

Ms Redford: These are dangerous words from the hon. member, government involvement. Government involvement, Mr. Speaker, leads to the public debt being increased with respect to the cost of electricity so that future generations need to take on that debt, and we're not going to do that.

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

Critical Transmission Review Committee Report

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about government involvement. Not surprisingly, a committee led by a former PC Party vice-president just came back with a report supporting this government's request to build more expensive transmission lines without an independent needs-based assessment by the AUC. The Premier talks a lot about listening to Albertans and consulting with them before any action is taken, yet it seems these new transmission lines are going full steam ahead. Is the Premier all talk, or will she stop this project in its tracks and send it to the AUC for an honest, transparent, needs-based assessment?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this is a very interesting report, which, of course, everyone will know the government received yesterday. We've made a commitment to respond to it in a very immediate time, and we will. There are some very specific recommendations in there with respect to cost sharing, with respect to competitive bid processing.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this was a panel made up of people who were consumer advocates, who understand the system, who consulted with over 50 people and, in fact, made recommendations that everyone will be fully aware were not my ideas last year. So I'm quite confident that as we move ahead and we look to economic development in this province, this is something that we're going to be able to work with.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, given that this committee agrees with opposition parties that Bill 50 should be brought back right here to the Legislature to remove this cabinet's ability to designate any future projects as critical, will the Premier commit to stopping this project right now until the government can introduce legislation allowing for a public consultation and independent experts to make the call and not cabinet? Independent, Premier.

Ms Redford: What's wonderful about this report is that it does give us a wide range of options. As we've said, Mr. Speaker, as our Minister of Energy has said, we will provide a comprehensive and fulsome response. We will not do what the hon. member is suggesting we do, which is cherry-pick. This is an important piece of integrated policy planning. We will respond. It will be a good response, and it'll be good for Alberta.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of cherry-picking going on here, winners and losers, and I hear Albertans are the losers in this Premier's hands.

Given that the report admits that the construction of these power lines will once again cause Albertans' power bills to go up and make these young people pay forever, is the Premier going to do anything to stop the continual gouging of Albertan families, or is she just going to leave them at the mercy of these huge private corporations?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, there are many people in this House that are fond of saying that this is question period and not answer period, but what I will say is that I would have appreciated it if the hon. member had listened to my first answer in this series of questions, where I talked about the fact that there were some really good recommendations in this and that we will be responding forthwith.

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

Castle-Crown Wilderness Area

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Castle-Crown area is a critical wildlife zone, the home of 223 species that are rare or at risk of extinction. Environmental groups have stated at length that this area is crucial to the maintenance of specific fish and wildlife populations. A recent survey has found that three-quarters of the residents are opposed to the logging in the area and wish Castle-Crown to be named a wildland park. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the Castle-Crown area is such a gem for watershed, wildlife, and recreation, how can you authorize logging in this area, an area that Albertans clearly want to preserve?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this is an issue, of course, that has been part of public discussion for the last couple of weeks and couple of months, and the minister has responded with respect to the policy that we have in place with respect to a forest management agreement. The most important piece of this is that what we're talking about is an area where there is abundant habitat. We do have wildlife that's thriving. I think that speaks to the fact that we have a forest management agreement in place that's allowing for economic development and environmental sustainability at the same time.

Mr. Chase: Again to the Premier: given that there are no proven pine beetle or fire threats in this area and that logging roads will facilitate even more illegal off-roading accessibility, how can this government justify this unjustifiable cumulative onslaught of the Castle-Crown?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I could scarcely do better than to echo the words of the Premier. The landscape that we see today, the beautiful landscape that's appreciated by Albertans far and wide, is a result of over a hundred years of harvesting. The habitat types that exist on that landscape today are the result of over a hundred years of harvesting and 50 years of full commercial logging. I think that speaks to the success of a management plan and the responsible operations of the companies.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The majority of countries, states, and provinces have abandoned the type of logging that has prevailed over the last hundred years.

Again to the Premier, in case we have a pop-up Whac-A-Mole: given that the Castle-Crown special area provides one-third of the water for southernmost Alberta as well as being a diverse habitat for plants and wildlife, when will you declare the Castle-Crown a wildland park? Will it be watershed or wood chips? Which side are you on?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, amongst the many, many values that we consider in forest management planning is watershed protection.

Ms Blakeman: It's a special place.

Mr. Oberle: I might point out to the hon. member, if the Member for Edmonton-Centre would allow me, Mr. Speaker, that we've done monitoring, not just planning but monitoring on those watersheds, and they're amongst Alberta's healthiest watersheds. Again, it's the result of 50 years of full commercial harvesting, 100 years of multiple forest use on that landscape. [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Okay. Okay. We've got every education leader in the province here today plus a number of children, and if this is the example we want to show to them, please, I will ignore the hon. member when the sixth question comes because she's already had more than her share to say this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Critical Transmission Review Committee Report (continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The decision-making process for the north-south power lines has been wrong from the very beginning and has asked landowners, businesses, and residents to pay the bills for big corporate profits. In 2004 Justice Tilleman stopped the building of these lines on the grounds of apprehension of bias, and this was upheld in the Court of Appeal by Justice Conrad. The government then pushed these lines forward by passing Bill 50 and declaring these lines critical. Now even their own review committee says that Bill 50 is wrong and that the process should go through the AUC. Will the Premier do what is right for Albertans and industry by restoring decision-making to the AUC and repeal Bill 50?

2:00

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the preliminary comments with respect to this question by the hon. member, quite frankly, are ancient history. Whether or not there may have been developments almost seven or eight years ago with respect to this are not relevant to the circumstances today. What I will say is that the report that we received yesterday did speak to the importance of economic development in this province, that part of that is ensuring that we have a connected grid. As I've said, we think there are some very interesting recommendations in this report, and as my Minister of Energy has said, we will be responding in a fulsome way, in a comprehensive way to this report in very due time.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, it's not ancient history.

Given the fact that AESO was offside on this and so was the cabinet, we need to review it again. Given that the government's own report admits that the review process is wrong by taking authority away from the AUC and not using a competitive procurement process for building the north-south lines, will the Premier please protect Albertans and our industries from overinflated power prices by repealing Bill 50 and stopping the overbuild?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, our friends on the other side here have been complaining for years now that, one, there was not enough consultation and, two, that we didn't take enough time. Well, we have done the consultation. We've done two months of consultation, and now we're taking the time to consider the recommendations that the committee has made. They can't have it both ways. Do they want us to take the time or hurry up? We're going to take the time and consider these recommendations.

Mr. Hinman: We've been consistent the whole time.

Given that the vast majority of the groups, especially those representing consumers and industry and those that were at the hearing of the north-south lines, were against it and given that the only cost-benefit analysis by the U of C showed that this is a multibillion-dollar boondoggle and given that the only presenters that actually supported these lines were those who would profit from them, will the Premier quit hiding behind this sham report

and tell Albertans why she is putting her interest and that of the power brokers ahead of Albertans?

Ms Redford: I have no particular interest in these power lines beyond the fact that I'm the Premier of a province that I believe will be the economic engine for the future of this country. What I saw yesterday, Mr. Speaker, in that that report was a framework that talked about how we can continue that success. We've had some very interesting discussions in the past two or three months about the importance of building infrastructure in this province, outside of this province, whether it's the Keystone pipeline or the Gateway pipeline. Infrastructure matters for economic development, and that's what Albertans are going to do.

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

Electricity Prices (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Alberta families are paying the highest electricity bills in Canada, but when this Tory government is challenged about it, they have no answers for Albertans. Instead, they respond with half-truths, misleading statistics, and red herrings. Mr. Speaker, Albertans want real answers for the highest power bills in history. Do you have one for them, Premier?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to table later today a report by London Economics International that shows power prices in context, comparing Alberta-delivered electricity prices with other Canadian provinces on a level playing field, March 2011. We'll be happy to provide that. This talk about Quebec prices – 96 per cent of the electricity in Quebec is generated by old hydro. They generate it cheap, and they sell it expensively down to the States. It's not an apples-to-apples comparison.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the Premier why she doesn't answer questions when they are put to her in this House. Why are you hiding behind your ministers?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I'm sitting here with a front bench of excellent cabinet ministers that know their issues, care about Albertans, consult with Albertans. There are certainly times when I answer questions. Every single time that a question is put to me, I ensure that the answer that is provided to this House is the most fulsome and detailed answer possible, and this is a cabinet that will ensure that happens. I believe that when we go forward in the future of this province, leadership is not about one person; it's about a team. I'm very proud of this team, and this team will continue to work together.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, at least we got an answer from the Premier even though it wasn't the question.

Given that electricity is an essential service for families, farms, and businesses, can the Premier explain why this government clings to a broken power market that is manipulated by big power companies, creating wild price swings and the highest power rates in Canada?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, these allegations are completely unfounded. The fact is that we in this province made a decision

many years ago that a deregulated market was good for Alberta consumers, for household consumers and for industrial consumers. What we will say is that while we move forward, if we look over what has happened in the past five years, as the Minister of Energy has said, we don't actually find the hon. member across being too upset when power prices are low, only when they're high.

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

Environmental Monitoring

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has an action and a credibility problem when it comes to environmental protection and our international reputation. All it does is try to sell a message rather than working to ensure that it has the scientific foundation and the action on the ground to back it up. To the Minister of Environment and Water: why is this government moving forward on monitoring without an independent commission in place? That is the only way to ensure scientific credibility. Why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are moving forward with monitoring, and we made that announcement with Minister Kent a couple of weeks ago. We're doing this in phases. We're moving forward with the monitoring, as I've said before, so we wouldn't lose the spring monitoring season. We've announced \$11 million in our budget. We have agreement from the industry that they will over the next three years provide \$50 million with regard to that. The next step, as I've said before, is that now we're working on this external body with regard to independent monitoring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. Without science that spring monitoring isn't going to be credible.

To the same minister: what is the reason to move forward without signed financial commitments in place? Without them we're leaving Albertans to carry the risk for all of the liabilities of this project.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say that, quite frankly, we have the support for what we're doing from people like Dr. Schindler who have also expressed their support with regard to the way we are moving forward and the quick manner that we are doing it. We have the support of the science community, academic community, industry, and our caucus colleagues here. We are moving with a science-based monitoring program that will be independent.

Ms Blakeman: Minister, I asked you about financial commitments. I don't think Dr. Schindler is going to pay for that.

To the same minister. The government appears to have grasped the concept of independent, science-based monitoring for the use of surface water. So how long do we have to wait for this same realization about groundwater monitoring, especially in association with fracking?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like, perhaps,

for the member to be listening as well. I did talk about not that Dr. Schindler would be paying for this but that along with our budget dollars, \$11 million, industry has committed over the next three years \$150 million to monitoring. We are already starting our groundwater mapping. We've done from Edmonton to Calgary. Quite frankly, we are going to continue working on the environmental issues that are important to Albertans.

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

Municipal Sustainability Initiative Funding

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former mayor and president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association I know the funding challenges faced by communities all across this province and the tremendous value of a program like the municipal sustainability initiative. This did not exist during my time as mayor. Recently the coverage following the budget announcement alleges that the MSI funding is based on how a municipality votes; namely, who their MLA is. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: are MSI funds awarded based on any such political discretion?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, it's incredibly unfortunate that such an accusation has been made. MSI was formed in consultation with the AUMA, AAMD and C, municipalities all across this province, an extensive consultation from one end to the other. The formula is very explicit. It's 48 per cent based on population, 48 per cent on the education property tax, and 4 per cent on roads. The municipalities can even go online and look at the value within about a week of exactly how much money they're going to get. There's no political playing with this game. Any suggestion otherwise is irresponsible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. Mr. Minister, to my recollection the AUMA and, by extension, municipalities in Alberta have always had an excellent working relationship with this government. Will the comments by the AUMA president harm this relationship?

2:10

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I've worked for 10 years as an MLA to build better communities. I've travelled all over this province, going to 328 of the 422 communities. Municipalities are an incredibly important partner in building stronger communities and a better province. The comments of one individual will not affect this province's relationship with municipalities in building a better Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: with the pending review of the Municipal Government Act are you and this government contemplating expanding any powers for municipalities to meet the growing diverse challenges faced by all these communities?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I've announced already that we're going to do an extensive rewrite of the Municipal Government Act in three different parts. We're going to do that in consultation with municipalities because we understand that municipalities have unique and new challenges from one end of this province to the other, and we have to make sure that municipalities have the tools, the resources, the responsibility, and the revenue to make the

appropriate decisions to serve their citizens, just like we in this Assembly serve the people of this province.

Education Funding

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education is big on making claims that the education system is being improved under his watch. That said, the facts speak for themselves. I see no accomplishment in telling school boards they're not getting adequate funding for the next three years. Why are there 450 fewer teachers in our classrooms this year compared to last? Does the minister honestly believe this is good for our children's future?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I am not only laying claim that I'm trying to improve an already excellent education system, not only because of myself or my predecessors here on the floor of the Legislature but, frankly, all of these education stakeholders that we have in the galleries. I have to tell you that we haven't yet debated the estimates on Education, but for the first time in the history of this province our educators, our partners, have the predictability of funding for the next three years. The budget for Alberta Education will be growing from \$6.8 billion to \$7.1 billion. However, local priorities on how many teachers need to be hired to deliver this high-quality education will be made by school boards.

Mr. Hehr: That answer and a buck 50 gets me a cup of coffee at Tim Hortons, Mr. Speaker.

I asked why there are 450 fewer teachers in the classroom today. Why and how has that happened under this minister's watch?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, if \$7.1 billion buys him a cup of coffee, he's a very thirsty young man.

Decisions are being made by school boards. I have to tell you that last fall the Premier and this cabinet committed an additional \$107 million. That hired 680-some teachers, I believe, and that \$107 million now is replicated in the three subsequent budgets. Decisions will be made at the local school board level on how many teachers are required to deliver the program.

Mr. Hehr: I guess it's the school boards' fault.

My last question is in regard to the minister's ability to budget. Given that the minister expects teachers will sign an agreement for a 1 per cent salary increase, along with unicorns and magical fairies how can the minister believe this is a legitimate number to budget on?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, there are no faults because we're not in the business of pointing fingers. I stress the word "partnership," and I find all the players in the system are partners in education. If they want to play the blame game, they're more than welcome to do it.

The fact is that we also will not be negotiating collective bargaining agreements on the floor of this Legislature. We have partners who will be negotiating, and I'm sure they will strike a deal that will be right for the children of Alberta.

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

Ambulance Services in St. Albert

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions, through you, will be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Many

municipalities, including the city of St. Albert, have a history of providing excellent paramedic services integrated with local fire departments. In 2009 Alberta Health Services took over these services with the promise that we would have improved service. Why is it that that service has declined to a critical stage, with excessive wait times being the norm?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would disagree with the hon. member that service levels have declined in St. Albert. In fact, the median response times for St. Albert lights-and-sirens calls have remained steady at around seven minutes since the transition. Response time for the 90th percentile has actually improved in St. Albert, from around 15 minutes at the time of the transition to around 13 minutes today.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, given that the city of St. Albert formerly had five ambulances and wait times of less than nine minutes and now has only two ambulances available a little more than half time and, of major concern, 8 per cent of the time St. Albert has no ambulances and wait times averaging 14 and a half minutes and sometimes up to one hour, what is the minister doing to respond to this unacceptable degradation of service?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, it has been very clear to me since the end of last year that we have a problem with data availability around EMS response times in Alberta, and that is why in January I asked Alberta Health Services to make all EMS response times in Alberta public on their website. That process will begin at the end of the month.

In response to the hon. member's question about ambulance availability, there is provision for up to five ambulances to be available in St. Albert at any particular point in time. There are currently two permanently stationed there and a third at the Sturgeon hospital. When that third ambulance is not on the road, Mr. Speaker, the paramedic assigned to that unit is working in the emergency department.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly agree that we do have a data problem.

Mr. Speaker, given that we had a very clear plan on how to eliminate the ambulance queue at the entrances to hospital emergency rooms, why do we continue to see ambulances and their attendants lined up, waiting to release their patients and get back on the road to answer other emergency calls?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, we do continue to see these delays, and one of the reasons we do is that over the last year emergency department visits in Alberta have gone up by an average of 17 per cent. That's a very significant increase.

I can tell the hon. member that I've had the opportunity to discuss the St. Albert issue with the mayor of St. Albert. We will continue to work together on this. There are some further developments I'll be able to announce shortly with respect to communication between EMS workers and AHS management.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For decades in Alberta an average of six children per year died on farms and

ranches, yet this hon. Human Services minister responded to my concerns in a letter dated January 2012: the restrictions the legislation places on the employment of children, including those relating to minimum wage and minimum age, do not apply on a farm or ranch environment. To the minister: is this an acceptable situation in Alberta in the 21st century?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta the vast majority of our farms are still family farms. It's traditional for families to work on the farms. The labour rules that apply in other workplaces across the province do not apply in that same manner on a family farm, but we also can work with families on farms. The loss of any child is horrendous, and the injuries of any person on a farm are horrendous, and we need to work on improving the understanding of safety and those sorts of issues on farms while we retain the right of families to work their farms.

Dr. Swann: That's a tiresome response, Mr. Speaker, for many, many in the farm-working industry. What do you mean to say when you say: we're putting children first? Six deaths a year.

Mr. Hancock: I put children first every day of my life, and I have every time [inaudible]. The future of this province depends on making sure that every child has the opportunity to maximize their potential. That means protecting children when they need protection, even on farms. But we don't go into people's houses; we don't go onto people's farms and tell them how to raise their children. We do protect children when they're in danger, and we do that through education, through family support, and through many other mechanisms. Every child is important.

Dr. Swann: I'm talking about industrial farms also and paid children. The Barley report suggested not only education; we have to have legislation on these farms. This is a judge. You are a lawyer. When are you going to act and get legislation to protect our children on farms?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we constantly look at what we can do better, and the minister of agriculture tasked a committee to bring forward a report on that. That report has come forward. We're looking at that now to see if there are other things that we can do, including possibly the question of whether changes in policy or legislation could be necessary. But let's be perfectly clear. Legislation doesn't make people safe. People understanding that they have to operate in safe conditions and they have to care about their workers: that's what makes people safe, and that's the kind of atmosphere we want on our farms across the province.

2:20 Medevac Services at Namao Air Base

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, media reports last week indicated that the President of Treasury Board and Enterprise was in discussion with the Edmonton Garrison to transfer medevac services to their airstrip from the Edmonton City Centre Airport. My question is for the President of Treasury Board and Enterprise. Is it true that medevac services will be moved to the Garrison?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague is partially correct. We are in preliminary discussions with the land force western commander at the Garrison about the possibilities around reactivating what was at one time the fourth-longest airstrip in the Commonwealth. There may be some opportunities there, but no decisions have been made at this time.

Mr. Drysdale: The safety of patients and transport times to local hospitals have been a concern of my constituents since it was announced that the city of Edmonton would be closing the downtown airport. Will transport time from the Garrison be a consideration in this decision?

Mr. Horner: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Because of the Health Quality Council report we need to find an alternate landing strip, so indeed we are looking at a number of different locations that will provide that. We view the Garrison as a possibility where we may be able to move not only medevac services but also the government of Alberta transportation services and perhaps some other private partners out to that strip. All of the parameters the Health Quality Council talked about, all of the parameters around distance to the airport, distance to hospitals, and patients coming in from the north are going to be considered.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, my final question to the same minister: is this the only option being considered, and when will a decision be made about where medevac services will be situated when the municipal airport closes?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we are actually looking at a couple of other possibilities for a secondary landing strip. Regardless of whether we go to the Edmonton International with the medevac services, we will still need to find an alternative landing area for bad weather or low altitude cloud levels. There are a few places in the area that we can look at; Namao is one of them.

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

Minimum Housing and Health Standards

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government behind closed doors is drafting new rules to weaken the safety of rental housing in a shameful effort to reward the Premier's political donors. Enforcement of the current standards is so poor that at least eight people have died in fires in recent years, and now this government wants to erode the rules so enforcement becomes impossible. My question to the minister of health is: why won't he agree that even \$20,000 in donations to the Premier is not worth legalizing fire traps for low-income Alberta families and, instead, commit to no changes to this document about standards in rental housing?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health and Wellness if it's appropriate.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This question is not only insulting; it's frankly very uninformed. I have been presented by my department with no draft changes to regulations under the Public Health Act that address window size and dimensions. I can think of fewer MLAs, perhaps with the exception of one in this House, that have appreciated in recent months the significant damage and stress and anxiety that fire causes in one's constituency, having just endured two in my area. My constituents are dealing with this issue; they're talking to me about it every day. We're dealing with it. We're strengthening the standards, not weakening them.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, then I ask the minister again: will you commit today that there will be no changes to the Minimum Housing and Health Standards document dated 1999? Are there no changes to it?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, until such time as I decide to entertain consideration of any options for changes to that regulation, the answer is no.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, given that the current requirements for windows and doorways to provide a clear, objective measure of what's safe to use for a bedroom that may hold children, grandparents, and people with disabilities, given that they're going to be thrown out or there's discussion of throwing those out in favour of the unenforceable term "reasonable," will the minister explain how his government or people in his government could have considered such changes for any reason except for being immoral? Your own staff have confirmed that these decisions are under consideration.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again and for the final time, I have no idea what information this hon. member has or thinks that she has or the source. I can tell you that the government is committed to maximizing safety for all residents, particularly those in rental suites, with respect to fire, and we'll continue to do so.

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

School Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm heartbroken to report that thousands of children go to school in Alberta in conditions close to those of Third World countries. Leaky roofs, bad plumbing, and substandard heating are the reality of too many students across the province, yet this government again failed to address the pressing infrastructure and maintenance needs that schools boards face on a daily basis. To the Minister of Infrastructure: is this your blueprint for our world-class education system, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the maintenance and the ongoing maintenance of schools are the responsibility of school divisions, and we flow about a hundred million dollars a year through to those school divisions. I'd stack our infrastructure in this province up against any jurisdiction in North America.

These things are a balance, and we struggle or wrestle with those just like a normal family does and any business does that decides priorities on where to put their money. I think this is a great example of how on one side we get told to spend more and on one side we're told to spend less. We're trying to find ways to spend smarter, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want our children safe in the schools. To the minister again: given the fact that Grimshaw school is clearly a health and safety hazard for all staff and students, how can you justify your department's denial of funds for school maintenance for the last 10 years? Fifty per cent of schools are 50 years old.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we're very well aware of the issue at Grimshaw school, and I feel for those parents and those students. I know the local MLA has been quite an advocate.

Obviously, the Department of Education has to stack up their priorities right across the entire province. Once again, there's only so much money to go around, but Alberta is investing about a billion dollars in 88 school projects right now, which dwarfs any

other province in the country. We'll continue to look forward and try and deal with issues like this as soon as we possibly can.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing gets done fast enough.

To the minister again: given that school boards across the province have raised concerns over the increased use of P3 partnerships to build their facilities and the rising costs associated with these projects, will the minister commit to the public construction of our public schools?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the P3 projects are a real good-news story in Alberta. Of course, we can't use them in every situation. They're not right in every situation, but one thing they do for Albertans is provide certainty. They provide certainty for us that there is going to be a budgeted amount for maintenance and that that school 30 years down the road is going to be in great condition as opposed to just rolling maintenance funding through to school boards and they have to weigh different priorities amongst themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Sale of Crown Land in Fort McMurray

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Media stories in Fort McMurray indicated that government is getting ready to release more Crown land in Fort McMurray for development. Can the Minister of Infrastructure tell us more about these plans and whether the land will meet the needs of the community?

The Speaker: First of all, verification: media reports are inappropriate.

Proceed.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's true that we are working on some more strategic land releases in Fort McMurray. Some of these were highlighted on pages 39, 40, 41 of the budget, where Fort McMurray was specifically mentioned, for the folks that actually read the budget. The people of Fort McMurray deserve to see a clear plan for which pieces of land are going to be released in which order so that we can send some clear signals to the market and we can help stabilize land prices in that very important part of the province.

Mrs. Leskiw: My second question is to the same minister. The second parcel of land in the Southlands area in Fort McMurray was supposed to have been put on the market early last year. Why the delay on this piece of land?

Mr. Johnson: That is a good question, Mr. Speaker. There were two pieces of land south of Fort McMurray that were anticipated to go on the market in the last year, both in an area called Southlands. One went on the market; folks down there were expecting the second piece to come on by the end of this last year, 2011. But it was always intended that the second parcel would not come on until the deal on the first parcel was closed, wrapped up. That took a little bit longer than we thought, with conditions being removed. That's done now. The second parcel will come on the market very soon.

Mrs. Leskiw: More land being available for development is fine, but too much land on the market may drive down property prices. Have you factored in people's investment before releasing all this land?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's a common concern. There's certainly an overdemand for land in the Fort McMurray area because of the incredible growth up there although some folks are concerned that if we release too much Crown land, it might depress prices. We've been working with the municipality and developers, the UDI, and other stakeholders to make sure that the plans we have going forward are measured and that we're going to be able to stabilize land prices without having an adverse effect on people that have invested in property up there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

2:30 **Electricity Prices**
(continued)

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is Valentine's Day. I hope everyone gives wishes to their loved one and a nice present.

The PC government just got a nice present from the power lines review committee, headed by one of the government's old boys. Apparently, he is now drinking Starbucks coffee as Alberta power bills continue to go from \$80 to \$160 an average home. This gives new meaning to double-double. My question to the Minister of Energy: does this concern you?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we're used to members on that side impugning the integrity of members on this side, but I'm a little tired of hearing attacks on members of the public who step up and serve the public interest. Does anyone really think that someone who's a former chairman of the University of Alberta, somebody who is a professor emeritus of electricity at the University of Saskatchewan and a member of the Royal Society of Canada or the current head of the business school over at the University of Alberta – are they subject to undue influence from us? No. They owe us nothing. They are independent. They were set up to give us advice, and that's what they've done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, given the minister's non answer and given that the minister is not concerned about Albertans' double-double power bills, why would any Albertan in a Tim Hortons coffee line trust what you're saying if you were to say, "Oh, it's only going to be a Timbit, your future power bill"? Why would we trust you?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, let the record show that Ted Morton goes to Tim Hortons, okay? I'm not a Starbucks guy. Let it also show, as I've already said, I'll be tabling a report today from London Economics that shows that Alberta's prices, when fairly compared, are completely competitive with nonhydro jurisdictions across Canada.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that the minister admits to drinking coffee at Tim Hortons like average Albertans, like all of us, I have to ask him: is someone putting something in your coffee by those answers?

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

Ten-point Plan for Education

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In January of this year the Education minister introduced an education 10-

point plan based on the consultation held in the fall of 2011. I received feedback from parents in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie, and there is some confusion as to whether or not this impacts the continued transformation agenda of the future. My question is to the Minister of Education. Can the minister assure this House of his continued commitment to the transformation agenda in light of his new 10-point plan initiative?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, definitely. Not only the transformation agenda but also all the work, the great work, that was done by the current minister of human resources on Inspiring Education will carry on and must carry on for us to maintain our standards in education. In the 10-point plan are simple initiatives that can be addressed right now with the current School Act. You shall see, hon. member, in a few minutes how the new Education Act contains many of these initiatives, and we are fully committed to carry on with those great initiatives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. With the 10-point plan the minister emphasizes the importance of parents' role in their children's education. Hasn't this always been the case? Haven't parents always been involved in different ways? How is it different?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, parents have. What this new legislation will do – and I'll be speaking to it generically now – is that it'll reassert the parents', the student's, the community's, and the educator's role in the child's learning. This is a communal initiative. It takes more than a teacher in a classroom to educate a child. It will also empower the parents to be active partners in education and make sure that they have access to the information that they require to make decisions in partnership with educators.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. In his 10-point plan the minister talks about building parks as part of building schools. Can the minister assure my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie on the brand new school in Summerside? Is it included as part of his 10-point plan?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I will have to look at that particular school, but I'll tell you that in Edmonton Dunluce elementary school just celebrated their 25th anniversary, and parents just raised enough money 25 years later to build the kids a playground. I firmly believe that if we want to keep our kids active and meet some of the initiatives that the minister of health has on wellness and if we require in our curriculum our kids to be continuously active, building a playground with an elementary school simply makes sense.

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

Revenue from Problem Gambling

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Of the \$492 million in gross profits from VLTs last year, 77 per cent came from the pockets and purses of people with, unfortunately, gambling problems. My first question is to the Deputy Premier. Why is this greedy Progressive Conservative government knowingly robbing problem gamblers instead of trying to help them get over their addictions to the VLT machines?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to the preamble in the sense that the AGLC works to ensure that the gaming industry is well managed. It provides responsible gaming information and resources. There are a number of responsible gaming initiatives that have been developed by the AGLC, and in some areas they are recognized as a leader in the research and the development of those programs: responsible gaming information centres, player awareness terminals, the voluntary self-exclusion program, mandatory training programs, including Reel Facts, Deal Us In, and A Good Call.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, again I'm going to ask the Deputy Premier this. Of the \$800 million in gross profits from slot machines last year, 72 per cent came from problem gamblers. Why is this greedy Progressive Conservative government knowingly robbing problem gamblers with slot machine addictions instead of trying to help them?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the data that he's claiming to have, 72 per cent. I don't think he has it either, and it's unfortunate that he would bring that kind of thing into the House. This is a serious issue that we take very seriously. We are making investments into problem gambling. We're making investments into addictions counselling. We're making investments into the mental health of all Albertans.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Deputy Premier: why is this greedy Progressive Conservative government hiding the actual percentage of profits they take from these gamblers with the VLT and slot machine addictions with an Enron-style accounting process? Why are you doing that?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I could, I suppose, call a point of order on that one. I could, I suppose, call it a number of things. It's an inaccurate, unarticulated, very poor question which does not deserve an answer.

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

Education Property Tax

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's headlines in the local newspaper in Red Deer stated: tax hike getting higher; provincial government approving largest education property tax increase in 20 years. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why is this government doing this?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I saw the headline, too, and I was somewhat taken aback by it. I asked my department to look it up. It's hardly a huge increase. The city of Red Deer itself is going to see an increase of \$4 per month in their property tax, a total of \$60 a year. I don't know where they get their numbers from. The total amount collected for education from Red Deer is \$38 million, which goes to help in the spending of \$160 million on educating the children of Red Deer.

Mrs. Jablonski: Again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that the budget documents said that no taxes were going up, why have I heard that education property taxes are going up?

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Media Reports

The Speaker: Hon. member, the problem with this is that we've

ruled this out before on many occasions. A verification of media reports, newspaper articles, is not the purview of this Assembly. If you're asking the minister to explain why a paper would say a certain thing, I don't know how that fits into the question period.

If the minister has something to add for further clarification, proceed.

Education Property Tax (continued)

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've in fact had a couple of calls to my office asking a very similar question, and I've explained to everyone that in this province right now in this budget the education portion of property taxes, income taxes, our business and corporate taxes have all been frozen. The reason why the amount of taxes collected has gone up is because we have a prosperous province, where more businesses, more people want to come and work and more houses are being built. That's what has increased the tax roll and the resources available to this government to provide services to Albertans.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education: does every penny of these education property tax revenues go into the classroom?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the dollars that are received from assessment, which is growing – the value of a house is growing, so the tax is growing, not the percentage that you pay – are about one-third of the cost of education. The rest is contributed by Albertans. I consider that, frankly, an investment. You don't spend money on education; you invest money in education. This is the future generation of our province, which will be generating wealth for all of us.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 18 members were recognized today, with 107 questions and responses.

In 30 seconds from now we will continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

2012 Western Engineering Competition

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize the competitors, volunteers, organizers, and sponsors of the 2012 provincial Western Engineering Competition, hosted by the University of Calgary. For 26 years the competition has inspired and challenged the minds of engineering students in western Canada, encouraging them to test their problem-solving skills in a competitive atmosphere. This year was no exception.

The five-day event allowed students to share engineering knowledge, challenge their skill set, and gain exposure to leaders in their chosen fields. Students competed in six challenges designed to showcase their talent outside the classroom. This year's competition focused on water, a resource Alberta is committed to managing and safeguarding now and in the future.

We all share responsibility for ensuring a healthy, secure, and sustainable water supply for our communities, environment, and

economy. Our quality of life depends on it. That's an important lesson for all of us, especially Alberta's next generation of engineers, and it would appear that they have taken this lesson to heart.

I would like to congratulate students from both the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary who placed first in the impromptu debate and engineering communication categories, respectively.

Mr. Speaker, this event was a wonderful showcase of the importance of engineering to Alberta's economy. May the lessons that these young engineers took away from the competition inspire them to continue on a path of successful research and innovation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Our Children, Our Future Education Consultation

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and speak about the Our Children, Our Future: Getting It Right consultations. Over eight weeks between November 2011 and January this year thousands of Albertans had the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas on the future of education through community meetings, online, by e-mail, by phone, and through social media. The feedback was remarkable.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity at the Bonnyville community meeting to see first-hand how Albertans speak passionately about education and want the best possible opportunities for our students. We heard about the importance of making schools safe and welcoming. We heard about making learning relevant for all students. We heard about keeping students engaged in their learning, and we heard about setting students up for success in life.

Maybe most importantly, we heard from students themselves who spoke eloquently about their challenges with schools and their hopes for the future. In fact, I'd like to share a few quotes from letters students from Dr. Brosseau school in my constituency wrote as part of the consultations. A grade 5 student: "School makes me feel mad because I don't want to get up in the morning to take my bus at 7 a.m. But it makes me feel happy because I like to learn and I want to get good grades and go to college and get a job that I want."

"If I could be minister for one day I would make sure that every student would participate in gym class. Gym gives students a chance to stay fit and I think it's very important for kids to stay healthy." A grade 6 student.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that the bold ideas collected through the Our Children, Our Future consultations have provided meaningful direction for government and will support new education legislation for the province. Thank you.

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

Community Sustainability Task Force Report

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week a report was tabled in this Assembly authored by the city of Edmonton Community Sustainability Task Force. The report, titled Elevate, looks into the plight of older inner-city neighbourhoods. As you and many members of this Assembly know, this is an issue I continue to highlight on behalf of my communities that I represent in Calgary-North Hill.

Today I want to share some words provided to my office from a constituent who eloquently describes the challenges faced by these communities and the residents. The subject of her e-mail is

Helping Our City To Grow Upward Rather than Outward. She writes:

After [the Premier] was elected, I heard her speak very eloquently, on the CBC Radio afternoon phone in show, to a father living in Edmonton's inner city, where a school had closed. His child now had to be bused . . . to the suburbs.

[The Premier] spoke about the importance of building vibrant inner cities that are welcoming to new families and the importance of helping our cities to grow up rather than out, for the sake of our environment. [The Premier] further commented that schools should be used for other community functions, in order to build strong community and generate revenue for the schools, in order to avoid closures.

My daughter and I live in Capital Hill (near Confederation Park) and often walk to school . . . I constantly talk to my daughter about the merits of living in the inner city, for us and for the environment. I also emphasize that we need to be a part of the social movement to end the urban sprawl, which poses so many difficulties for our city and our province's already stretched resources.

Sadly, if [my daughter's school] closes . . . [she] will have to be bused or driven to school. It seems like a move in the wrong direction for Calgary and for Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, today I urge the hon. Premier, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and the Minister of Education to work with our two large municipalities, four metro school boards, and other relevant government and community stakeholders to implement an urban inner-city revitalization strategy which implements the recommendations of the Elevate report. Thank you very much.

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

Castle-Crown Wilderness Area

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dirty rascals. For hundreds of years children at play attempting to outposition one another have chanted: I'm the king of the castle, and you're the dirty rascal. Unfortunately, in Alberta when it comes to protecting our Castle-Crown region, we have neither a benevolent king or a queen championing the cause but, rather, a short-sighted army of dirty rascals. The foot soldiers in this mercenary army of clear-cutting devastation contracted to the Spray Lake Sawmills, based out of Cochrane, are operating within the morally and economically deficient regulations of the ministry of sustainable resources.

With the battle cry of Stumps Trump this horde of legalized locusts has been granted permission to level one-half of the forested region of the Castle-Crown, an area recognized as one of 81 special places by the government of Alberta in 1998. The term "special," whether applied to a geographic location or to the needs of vulnerable Albertans, affords little or no protection by this government. The economic value of exported wood chips pales in comparison to the costs associated with damaged watershed, destroyed habitat, facilitated illegal off-road trail access, species endangerment to name just a few of the environmental concerns raised by the 80 per cent of southern Albertans opposed to the government's endorsed devastation.

To add further insult to injury, Alberta taxpayers will cover the cost of paving the road to the Castle ski resort. Travelers will be afforded a smoother ride as they view the clear-cuts along the resort road. As Spray Lake has been granted similar first in time, first in right government permission to log along scenic route highway 40 in K Country and around Bragg Creek, the province's environmental motto appears to be Bald Is Beautiful.

Albertans will soon have the opportunity to make a decisive cut of their own by registering their concerns at the ballot box.

2:50

Introduction of Bills**Bill 2
Education Act****The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education.**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, Bill 2, the Education Act.

Education and the preparation of Alberta children for the future and the future of this province is a priority for this government. I am proud that the gallery is filled today with a number of educational partners, who I was pleased to introduce earlier.

The duties and demands placed on our education system today extend far beyond those of the late 1980s, when the School Act was introduced. We understand that education is the foundation of a democratic and civil society. We understand that education inspires students to discover and pursue their aspirations and interests and cultivates a love of learning and the desire to be a lifelong learner. Our understanding of these concepts has grown and has been enhanced by the extensive conversations Albertans have had with government over the past few years about the future of education.

Albertans take great pride in our education system, and they want to ensure that it continues to be world class. Our first responsibility is to make sure that all decisions are student centred and all decisions relate to learning and education. Albertans also said that education must help students make successful transitions to adulthood and create lifelong learners who contribute to healthy, inclusive communities and thriving economies.

What we heard in our most recent consultation confirmed that the direction we took from Inspiring Education was the right one but also led us to place stronger emphasis on two elements in education: one, that students are entitled to welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments; and, two, that education is a shared responsibility among boards, classroom staff, parents, students, and the community. As a result, we have made a good piece of legislation even better. For example, to foster the important partnership between boards, parents, and the community . . .

**Speaker's Ruling
First Reading of Bills**

The Speaker: I'm sorry. By tradition first reading is a moving of a bill, tabling it in the Assembly. In the past we've had a discussion with respect to explanation on first reading of bills. I indicated at the time we did it that private members' bills would offer an opportunity for individuals to speak up to probably no more than four minutes on a private member's bill, but I also indicated that if it was a government bill, not a private member's bill, they should look at a maximum of two minutes. There are some reasons for this. The minister will have ample opportunity to move this bill in second reading and will be able to speak up to 20 minutes. So I would ask the minister to kindly move the bill.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It will take more than tradition to contain my excitement for education, but I will keep it short and tell you that I am very proud to table Bill 2, and I move that the bill be read the first time.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

**Bill 3
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012****The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Premier and President of the Treasury Board and Enterprise.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 3, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a report by London Economics International, which shows that when fairly compared, Alberta's electricity prices are competitive across Canada.

Mr. Denis: I'm tabling five copies of an article which I referred to yesterday entitled The Myth of Alberta's "Non-progressive" Income Tax. It's by Scott Hennig of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, dated January 20, 2011, and it talks about the many benefits of the single rate of tax that all Albertans enjoy.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today that, given the shortness of time yesterday, I did not do. The first tabling is from Frank Fraser. I'm sure the Minister of Energy would be very interested in his document. He details at length his experiences with Direct Energy, trying to deal with overseas call centres and trying to get his electricity cut off after Direct Energy, on contract, gave them two accounts and then put the money in the wrong one. So that's on that particular issue.

My next tabling is from Chantele Theroux, who is writing about downtown owners and the difficulty with additional assessments being made when building codes or shoddy workmanship is not caught. They ended up with very expensive assessments. She's looking at possibly losing her condominium because they are now looking at owner assessments of over \$34,000 for a fairly modest condominium. So, clearly, there's an issue here that needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

My final tabling is from Ann-Lise Norman, and she's bringing to the attention of the Assembly the concern around the Castle region in Alberta that's been raised a number of times already today. I attach a copy of her letter to the editor on that subject.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to table the requisite number of copies of the e-mail from a constituent, Rayn Boyko, that I just referred to in my member's statement.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling e-mails and five letters from the following individuals who are seeking the preservation of the Castle wilderness: Gustave Yaki, Pat Lucas, Stuart McDowall, Sandra Bullock, Elaine Voth, Cheryl Bradley, Jim Cameron, Marion S. Wright, Richard Collier, Gordon Petersen, Carol Getzlaf, Margaret Main, Carolyn Fisher, David McIntyre, Carolyn Aspeslet, Dr. Samuel Lawn, Reynold Reimer, Timothy Grier, John Holmes, and Lorne Fitch. Lorne is a retired fish and wildlife biologist and an adjunct professor with the University of Calgary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm presenting a letter with the requisite number of copies from Robert and Linda Mattice of Entwistle, Alberta. In their letter they indicate the significance of their power bill increases, the lack of choice in their area as they're only able to choose from one provider, the fact that they are only allowed to pick one option, which is charging them essentially higher than almost anywhere else in Alberta. Their letter details this in great detail, and they have some corresponding documents. Should anyone want to question the veracity of their claim, it's all there for everyone to see.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of postcards we've received from hundreds of Edmontonians calling on the government to provide full funding to open the family medicine and urgent care sections of the East Edmonton health centre.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling today from Sue Thomas of Calgary, a worker in the disabilities field, who wants to register both some appreciation and real concern about the lack of financial support for those working in the disability field. I quote: "We are grossly under-funded." The bonus given this year is much less than what it appears, and it makes it extremely difficult for us to feel valued and to live our lives.

Thank you.

3:00

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, Minister of Education, a publication undated entitled *The Network*, conference edition, prepared by the Alberta initiative for school improvement.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

7. Mr. Liepert moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate February 9: Ms Blakeman]

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for this opportunity to respond to last week's budget speech. Oil is at a hundred dollars a barrel, Albertans are being denied basic services that they truly deserve, and we still have a deficit. Have you ever asked yourselves that question: why do we have a deficit? It's difficult to know where to begin addressing this document.

I'll start with a simple fact. This budget is a fudge-it budget. I say this is a fudge-it budget because it fudges revenue numbers in order to hide the fact that this current government has completely lost its way. This fudge-it budget uses pie-in-the-sky estimates of revenues the province can expect to take in over future years in an

attempt to trick Albertans into voting for a government that is sorely lacking, a government which is old, tired, and out of ideas, so devoid of ideas, in fact, that the only proposals they can make are imperfect imitations of policies proposed by the party that I lead, sort of like a wolf in sheep's clothing or a Conservative in Liberal clothing.

Dr. Swann: Imitation is a form of flattery.

Dr. Sherman: Imitation is a form of flattery, Mr. Speaker, but you know what? Albertans deserve the real thing.

Worst of all, this is a government which lacks the courage to be honest about its record and which lacks the courage to be honest with Albertans about the elephant in the room, and that is our structural deficit, a direct result of inadequate revenues and this current government's fear of doing what is needed to fix the problem.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that health care alone costs \$15 billion? Total personal and corporate income taxes only bring in about \$12 billion. They alone do not pay for our health care bill.

Not so long ago this government's ministers fanned out across the province on what all but the most naive knew to be a pre-election tour financed by the Alberta taxpayers. "Oh, no," the government protested. "It's no such thing; it's a listening tour." A listening tour. This government talks a lot about listening, actually, but who are they listening to? They say they're listening to Albertans, but I wonder which ones. Which Albertans told them to continue blowing through all our resource revenue just to pay today's bills? Even then they're not covering the bills. I haven't met these Albertans.

Who told this government that Albertans don't see a need for tax fairness so we can start saving our finite resource revenue? Since my party made our fair tax proposal, I've met and heard from a great many Albertans who enthusiastically say yes. It's hard to believe that this current government didn't meet any of them. If they did, they certainly didn't listen to what they had to say.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the current ministers met any Albertans who are absolutely sick and tired of paying the highest electricity bills in the country, and we are an energy province. I've certainly met a lot of them. If the ministers crossed paths with any of these good people – and it is impossible to imagine they didn't given the vast numbers of them – why didn't they listen and make a commitment in this fudge-it budget to do something about these outrageous bills? They talk about choice. It's a choice of high bills or higher bills. It's about competition. Albertans are competing to get the energy that they own.

Why didn't this government listen to our most vulnerable – to our seniors, to the hard-working Alberta families, and to businesses, who drive the economy – and take measures to undo the damage of electricity deregulation? An abject policy failure which costs us billions, and this government just carries on the path to a bad decision and a wrong decision. The Albertans I met would have applauded if this current government had done so. I'm left to conclude that either these government ministers were too busy meeting supporters on their tour, their campaign supporters, or else they didn't listen to any real Albertans they did meet.

Mr. Speaker, if our intrepid government ministers, while jet-setting across the province in luxury aircraft and luxury buses and staying in luxury resorts, met any real Albertans who were dismayed at the fact that we spend the most on education yet have the highest dropout rate in the nation, judging by the modest 3.4 per cent increase in total program spending in this fudge-it budget, I doubt it. We have amongst the highest class sizes, not enough

support for our teachers, and crumbling infrastructure for our schools, with leaky roofs and foundations that need repairing.

This modest 3.4 per cent increase, after all, is woefully inadequate to keep up with inflation and population growth. We've got a baby boom. We've got a ton of young children coming down the pipeline in this province who are going to help build this province, and this government is not investing in them. Once again, this government is asking our schools to get by with less, leaving it to the school boards yet not funding them properly. Hardly inspiring.

I also wonder if these ministers took time away from their rallies to talk to real Alberta parents who are sick and tired of being gouged by school fees. Considering that school fees are still in place, they clearly did not listen to any of these parents, parents who are reacting enthusiastically to our commitment to get rid of school fees, the most regressive tax I know of, a tax on learning, a tax on families, and a tax on our children.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government ministers took the time to meet with postsecondary students as they travelled through strategic ridings in the province during the listening tour. If they did, they would have heard cash-strapped students saying that they need a break. They need a break because Alberta's sky-high tuition levels are burdensome in the extreme.

We've listened to these students. I was in Lethbridge, and that's exactly what these students told me. We need a break. That's why we would not just cap tuition but immediately reduce it by \$250 per student and then proceed to eliminate tuition entirely by 2025 whether you went to a trade school, a college, or a university in rural Alberta or in urban Alberta. Mr. Speaker, this is a very big issue in rural Alberta. When you have to leave home, you not only pay the high cost of living but pay the highest tuition fees. Our children in rural Alberta are not being afforded the opportunity to get the education that they truly deserve, the education that we as a society owe to them.

We would fix this. We would fix this by cutting this government's wasteful spending, by bringing in a fair tax, and by investing some of our resource revenues every year in a postsecondary education fund. The response we have received to this proposal from postsecondary students has been very strong and very positive. Why didn't this current government listen to these students and do likewise?

Mr. Speaker, they did do a half-baked measure recently. They did. The reason I call it half-baked is that they allowed students the opportunity to get more student loans. That just allows them to get into more debt. The way to prevent student debt is to actually cut tuition. That's how you get our children to go get a skill and an education. Instead, this government cut the budget for the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology by more than \$150 million. Our universities have roofs that need fixing. They need more teachers and professors in the classrooms and more support. How can we go to a knowledge-based economy when we don't invest in the knowledge and education of our children?

3:10

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government ministers met any of the Albertans who use our health care system, the men, women, and children who cannot find a family doctor or who have endured unconscionable delays in the emergency rooms and surgery wait times. Worse yet is when they sit at home after that urgent 911 call waiting for that ambulance to arrive. Many times it doesn't arrive in time.

Did they meet any of the hard-working doctors and nurses and front-line staff who struggle heroically to deliver care despite the extraordinary lack of efficiency and accountability plaguing our

system? If they did, they would have heard that we spend more than any other province, yet we have amongst the longest waits and the worst performance outcomes in the country. There's no doubt that once they get into the hands of provincial health care workers, Albertans get world-class health care. No doubt about that. Mr. Speaker, I can say that because I've worked with a fantastic team of front-line health professionals.

If this government had listened, they would have heard that we have a great many seniors languishing in hospital beds because there are not enough not-for-profit long-term care beds or not-for-profit, community-based lodge beds. They would have heard that the direct result of this, actually, is congestion in emergency rooms because the hospital beds are full. They would have heard that our ambulances are idling outside our ERs because paramedics can't leave until their patients are admitted to an emergency bed. They would have heard all these things if they had taken the time to meet Albertans who use our health care system. This health care system problem is because of an abject failure in funding our seniors with world-class home care, lodge care, and long-term care.

However, it seems that once again this government did not listen because all that their budget offers is \$375 million over the next three years, quoting from the government's press release, "to support strategic health investments, including family care clinics, additional addictions and mental health services, home care, and enhanced rehabilitation programs." They obviously didn't listen to the doctors, the nurses, and the front-line staff because they think the solution is to simply throw money at the problem by increasing AHS's base operating fund by 6 per cent. That doesn't fix the health system, Mr. Speaker. Making the right decision fixes the health system.

Albertans, however, can tell you that what we really need is a smarter and more efficient health care system, which is what we propose. This is what Albertans are asking for, and while the government isn't listening, we are. Health care is the number one expenditure in the nation. It accounts for 40 to 50 per cent of expenditures, and Albertans and Canadians are waiting in lineups longer than ever. Our health care system in this country and in this province is not in the top three amongst the OECD countries.

While this government moves on the path to Americanization and for-profit privatization and for-profit, private tendering of contracts yet untendered contracts to their private buddies, we propose a doubling of home care funding and providing nonprofit, community-based lodge care and nonprofit, community-based long-term care beds for our seniors so they may get the dignity that they require. This, in turn, will free up space in our hospitals so Albertans can get timely access to world-class care, that has taken way too long to get.

If this government had been listening, they would know that what is needed is not a handful of pilot projects dreamt up by an uninformed Premier. We don't need pilot projects, Mr. Speaker. It's time for action and solutions. It's time to fix the system. The province is looking for leadership. They are not looking for another committee and another study. If this government had truly been listening, they would have also known that what is needed is improved performance and a concept which is alien to them, accountability. Accountability. Nowhere else in the country or in the world do administrators get fired, get a million or a couple of million dollars or maybe \$22,000 a month for life while Albertans suffer metres from care.

If you look today on Alberta Health Services' website, the top health care performance measure: they set it at a paltry 60 per cent level. They can't even achieve their own level, Mr. Speaker. They can't achieve their own paltry, low, stretch targets.

The number one spending issue: there's nothing in this fudge-it budget to improve the system, to improve performance, or to introduce accountability. This government doesn't listen, they don't understand, and they don't care. All they want to do is win an election. That's it. Well, we're listening, Mr. Speaker. This is why we will fix this mess created by this government, and we will guarantee emergency and surgery wait times within two years, get every Albertan a family doctor, return decision-making to the front lines, and bring in local accountability amongst other much-needed measures. This government isn't listening, but we are.

Mr. Speaker, this is a fudge-it budget that inflates future revenues, and it pulls the oldest trick in the government's playbook, big pre-election spending promises. We've all seen this movie before. My dear citizens of Alberta, do not be fooled. They pulled the wool over your eyes in the last election. Do not be fooled. We know what comes next if this government wins re-election. They're going to go, "Whoops, the international economy is bad," and they're going to be bringing in big postelection spending cuts. "Whoops. It wasn't our fault; it was the international economy's fault." There are other governments across the world that don't go: whoops; it's the international economy's fault. They've put hundreds of billions in the bank, and they're living off the interest, and they say yes to their people.

Mr. Speaker, this current government follows this formula because it cannot win the battle of ideas. It cannot. This government was once a force for solutions. It is now the cause of our problems in this great province. It was a force for solutions but is no longer. It's no longer what's best for this province. It's tired. It's old. It's out of ideas. They say that they listen, but what they do – this played-out government is reduced to cheap trickeries and completely lacks the courage to be honest to Albertans.

They say that they listen, but this is not borne out by the fact that they completely ignore Albertans who ask for fair taxation. Ninety per cent of Albertans, hard-working Albertans, wouldn't pay a red cent extra. In fact, if they've got kids in school or university, they'd get money back in their hands.

They ignore the demands for an end to the disastrous deregulation of the electricity market, they ignore parents who are sick to death of being gouged by school fees, and they ignore postsecondary students who want a break from the highest tuition fees in the country. They ignore Albertans who are asking, who've been pleading for years for a family doctor and for shorter emergency and surgery wait times. This government says that it listens, but they're only in it for themselves and for their buddies; hence, the pork-barrel politics and untendered contracts.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, we will provide a positive alternative for Albertans when election day rolls around because we will listen for a change. We will listen for a change. We will also do something that this government is too scared to do. We're going to be honest. We've tabled our plan, our vision for Alberta. We will be honest with Albertans about the biggest problem facing our province's finances, a structural deficit caused by wasteful spending and inefficient revenues. We will clean up this government's mess and put an end to fudge-it budgets and bring in a fair tax so we can actually start saving some of our resource revenues to invest in people by ending school fees and eventually eliminating tuition and fixing our health care system and caring for our seniors and our vulnerable.

Investing in People is something this current government uses as a slogan, but for us it's a guiding principle, Mr. Speaker. It's a guiding principle, and it starts with listening, caring, taking action, and saying yes.

Mr. Speaker, the fundamental difference between us and them is that they believe in saying no to the people. They believe in saying no, and they believe in trickle-down economics and think that money in the hands of a few people drives the economy. We believe that money needs to be in the hands of the working families, and that drives the economy.

Mr. Speaker, we say yes. We say yes to taking action to cut wasteful spending, stop pork-barrel politics, and bring in smart, lean, efficient government. We say yes to investing to make the lives of Albertan families better. We say yes to fair taxation. We say yes to balancing the books. We say yes to saving for the future for our children. We say yes to Albertans. We say no to this budget but yes to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, it's been an honour. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, proceed.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to hear the leader's comments on what he feels to be the major barrier to getting over the structural deficit in this province and what he would do to ensure that we move away as quickly as possible from a continued, year-after-year deficit position in this province that is so vulnerable to other markets and resource prices.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, our biggest problem with the structural deficit is that the government is addicted. They're addicted not only to raising money off those with addiction problems, but they're addicted to raising revenues off nonrenewable resource revenues. They're addicted to buying elections, to just suddenly throwing money out there before the election and taking it all back the day after the election and hoping that Albertans will forget. They're addicted to not being honest with Albertans. They're addicted to not having the courage – the courage – to say what's right.

Mr. Speaker, if anything the courage they need is to say: listen; it's about fairness. It's okay to make a buck. It's okay for large corporations to make a buck. Today we have international nation states: China, France, the Arab world, the U.S. It's okay for them to invest here, and it's okay for them to make a buck in Alberta. But you know what? A little bit more of the fair share of that money should stay here to care for our seniors and educate our children, and that's why we need to increase our taxes for large corporations from 10 to 12 per cent. It's fair. It's reasonable.

We need to bring in a fair personal tax. That's how you fix a structural deficit, a fair personal tax. Mr. Speaker, 90.4 per cent of Albertans earn less than \$100,000 a year of taxable income. We suggest leaving them alone. If you earn above a hundred thousand bucks a year of taxable income for one person in a family – let's bring in a fair, progressive tax. Let's put the word "progressive" back in Alberta. That's what this is about. That's how you fix it, honesty and fairness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: There's still time available under 29(2)(a).

There being no further questioners, I am prepared to recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and respond to this government's budget. I appreciate the comments of the Leader of the Official Opposition. You know, I obviously disagree with him on some of his solutions, but I also agree with him on some of the problems that he's diagnosed and some of the things that we could do without.

It really is something. I wish the folks at home could see the laughter on the other side when an hon. member of this House stands up and gives a speech and, you know, tries to represent Albertans and talks about courage and is essentially ridiculed across the way. It should be quite beneath some of the folks on that side in that regard.

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

In response to this budget, Mr. Speaker, Albertans expect their government to live within its means. They also expect their government to ensure that their tax dollars are spent carefully on key priorities such as health, education, infrastructure, seniors, policing, and other core social services. This PC Budget 2012 does neither. It is a reckless, electioneering, campaign document with unrealistic revenue projections and irresponsible spending promises. Given the tepid and fragile world economic recovery Budget 2012 is nothing short of a blueprint for eliminating the province's last remaining savings and raising taxes for Albertans.

What do we mean when we say: these projections, these pie in the sky projections, this *Alice in Wonderland* budget that we refer to over here? Well, let's take a look at some of these projections and see just how wonderfully realistic they are. In this budget there is an overall 22.5 per cent increase in revenues over the next two years – 22.5 per cent over a two-year period. How very conservative an estimate that is. There's a 40 per cent increase in resource revenues over the next two years. We've talked with folks at some of the major pipeline companies in Alberta, household names in the industry anyway, and in response to that number, a 40 per cent increase in two years, the word they used was "hallucinogenic."

It is an absolute joke to say that we are going to have an increase of 40 per cent over two years in our resource royalties. It's just not conservative. You can call it what you want, but it certainly is not realistic in any way, shape, or form. Anybody over there who knows anything about accounting or business or business projections knows that you do not project on the high end for revenues. That's a mistake, and everybody knows it. You always make sure you do a conservative estimate. You don't have to lowball it so much that it's unrealistic either, but you take a conservative estimate. Forty per cent over two years is egregiously unrealistic.

An increase of 6.5 per cent in property values and property tax revenues to the budget is unrealistic. We're in the middle of a housing collapse. We're still trying to get out of that. I know what the home values are in Airdrie, for example, and what's happened. I know from talking with many of the real estate agents that unless Calgary and area is unlike all the rest of this province, they're not going to go up 6.5 per cent. The value of our homes isn't going up 6.5 per cent this year. It's unrealistic.

A 9 per cent increase in income tax revenues this year, 9 per cent in one year: well, I sure hope income taxes do go up. That means more jobs. That means more people working and so forth. But 9 per cent? Absurd.

An 11 per cent corporate tax revenue increase this year: it's like we don't even know what's going on in the world right now. We look at the fragile recovery, the lack of recovery, and we're talking about an 11 per cent corporate tax revenue increase?

Projecting the average oil price at \$105 next year and at \$108 the year after that. You know what, Mr. Speaker? That one may come true. It's unlikely, but I would say that it's the lesser of the pie-in-the-sky projections that I see in this budget. But note that at \$105 next year the other side, the PCs, still will not balance the budget. They'll balance the accounting deficit budget, but they'll

still be drawing down from the sustainability fund. At \$105 a barrel: what an embarrassment. I mean, what are we going to tell our kids? We can't balance the budget at \$105 a barrel. Is that some kind of bad joke? It should be.

Projecting the natural gas price at \$3.50 this year – it's roughly at \$2.10 right now; it's very low, so it's already way below that right now – then \$4.20 the year after that and \$5 the year after that: every projection that we've seen does not have that type of increase in the price of natural gas.

3:30

Mrs. Forsyth: What about the money they lose when the dollar is at par?

Mr. Anderson: And there's the Canadian dollar and several other things.

Needless to say, the projections in this budget are pie in the sky, they're unrealistic, they're certainly not conservative, and they're irresponsible. If we're relying on these things to balance the budget and pay for a 7 per cent increase in spending, it opens our budget up, essentially, to just completely implode if the price of oil were to, say, fall to \$75, which historically is a pretty high level.

You can't run a business like this. You shouldn't run a government like this. The folks over there, many of whom I know, are smart individuals. A lot of them have run businesses. A couple of them have accounting backgrounds and so forth. They know this. They absolutely know this, yet they say nothing.

There is another way. The Wildrose caucus has put together a balanced budget alternative. Now, we will say right up front that in order to give an apples-to-apples comparison of spending, we are using the government's projections this year. Again, those projections are unrealistic, but we've built into our alternative budget a \$1.6 billion cushion in order to account for what we think are pie-in-the-sky projections.

What would the Wildrose balanced budget alternative do? It would result in a \$1.6 billion budget surplus and a \$60 million cash surplus for 2012-13. Specifically, it would invest \$4.1 billion in new infrastructure. Four point one billion dollars on infrastructure is an amount per capita significantly higher than B.C., Ontario, and Saskatchewan. It is still the highest of all the provinces except – essentially, it's the same as Quebec. But that's where it's at. This is really not an unrealistic or an unreasonable amount. It's tied for the highest in Canada.

These capital dollars, this \$4.1 billion, would be focused primarily on the building of high-priority capital projects, which we would post online in the order of priority to make sure everybody knows why they're in the priority that they are. It would be publicly posted. Everybody would see it. Such high priority projects would include finishing up the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads, the twinning of highway 63 to Fort McMurray, long-term care facilities for seniors – very important – and urgently needed schools while delaying capital projects for which the government right now has no money to fully staff.

So all of the capital projects out there right now will be continued on. They will just be spread out an extra year to give us some time to actually hire the staff that we need to fully staff them. All of the folks waiting for their health facilities in other areas or for the roads to be twinned in other areas – those will all be built under this Wildrose alternative budget. Some of the lower priority ones of those projects will just have to wait an extra year. This would save Albertans \$1.6 billion compared with the proposed Budget 2012 by the government.

We would increase operational spending by \$854 million. This is a 2.5 per cent increase over Budget 2011. In comparison, the PC Budget 2012 increases spending by over \$2.3 billion, or 7 per cent. By increasing the operational budget by just 2.5 per cent as opposed to 7 per cent, this will save Albertans \$1.5 billion compared with Budget 2012.

We would ensure that the majority of the nearly \$1 billion in new operational funding would be sent directly to the front lines. This will be done by freezing all public-sector wages for one year, just one year – everyone’s wages, if you’re working for the government, frozen for one year – and also by implementing a hiring freeze on all non front-line staff. Front-line staff, obviously, are nurses, doctors, teachers, et cetera. Unless you’re on the front lines, we will not be hiring additional folks. We would direct all of this new 850-odd million dollars towards the following – and we can do this because of the hiring freeze. That’s what happens when you control wages; you can hire more people. It’s a fantastic concept that the government needs to look into.

First, we would hire 1,425 new teachers, teaching assistants, and support staff for students with special needs, particularly that last category, students with special needs. They desperately need more teaching assistants, more help in the K to 12 system. That will cost \$114 million. The Education minister informs me that might be a little bit too low; it would be closer to \$145 million. Nonetheless, our projection would be \$114 million because many of those wouldn’t be teachers. They would be teaching assistants and support staff.

One thousand new senior care support workers for home care, long-term care, and assisted living. This would cost \$50 million. Again, we have seniors clogging up our hospitals. They don’t want to be there. They want to be in long-term care facilities, where they can get better care and the care they need. That would free up acute-care beds across the province. That’s \$50 million.

We would increase AISH payments by \$400 a month, as the government does in their budget, at a cost of \$270 million. We would increase funding for mental health by \$50 million. One thousand new nurses, technicians, and other health support staff: \$80 million. Improved access to emergency rooms and family doctors: \$100 million. We would increase funding by nearly \$80 million for additional publicly funded health procedures such as a thousand knee surgeries, a thousand additional hip surgeries, 8,000 cataract surgeries, and 50,000 MRIs, CT scans, and other diagnostic tests. Again, amazing what you can do when you freeze salaries even just for one year to get things back into balance. You have all those extra dollars to go straight to the front lines. No bureaucracy. No red tape. Helping Albertans right at the front.

We would hire 300 new police officers, corrections officers, and sheriffs, including five dedicated checkstop teams at \$53 million. We would budget to plan better for emergencies and natural disasters at \$100 million.

We would eliminate wasteful PC spending like the \$2 billion carbon capture and storage program and dismantle the Alberta Health superboard bureaucracy, putting all those folks to the front lines, or these vice-presidents can go find a job in the private sector. We would implement zero-based budgeting. We would, through attrition and buyouts, increase the worker-to-manager ratio in the public service from 4 to 1 to 10 to 1. That would obviously take more than just one year. We would cut all management bonuses for at least one year, and we’d roll back cabinet salaries by 30 per cent and cut MLA severance packages by over 67 per cent.

I know I only have roughly two minutes remaining, so I would like to close by saying this. In this province we don’t have to say that if we balance our budget and do what we need to balance the

budget, that means cutting front-line services. That is an argument of the far, far, far – I don’t even know if it’s a left-wing argument. It’s just a wrong argument. We can do both. We can balance the budget, and we can get more money directly to the front lines helping Albertans. That’s what the Wildrose alternative budget does. Further, what it also does is that it balances the budget without raising taxes.

Again I would ask the government before this session is over to please join with the Wildrose and pledge – I would say that surely we can agree that the majority of Albertans are going to be supporting one of our two parties in the next election. If that is indeed the case, will they stand with the majority of conservative Albertans across this province and commit that under no circumstances will there be any tax increases on the people of Alberta for the next four years, that none of the folks elected in that party over there and this party over here at the next election, that under no circumstances will we agree to raise taxes on Albertans. I think we can do it. I think that’s what Albertans want. They want us to live within our means. We owe it to our children and the future of Alberta to do just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Section 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to question the previous speaker or make comment on his comments.

Seeing none, is there anyone else who wishes to speak to the main motion? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for this opportunity to address the Assembly on behalf of the Alberta Party and to bring greetings on behalf of our leader, Glenn Taylor.

We’ve all had a few days to think about the new provincial budget, and first I want to engage in a little deconstruction of the budgeting process as practised by the PC government. Provincial budgets are made up of two parts. There’s the actual budget for the next 12 months, and then the way this government does it, there are projections for the 24 months to follow. Usually the actual budget has at least a nodding acquaintance with the truth. Governments outline how much revenue they can reasonably expect to collect this year, how much they plan to spend and on what they plan to spend it, how much of a surplus or deficit will be left once expenses are subtracted from revenue, and then they have a plan that they will follow, more or less, most of the time, provided nothing happens that makes the roof cave in.

It’s the budget projections for next year and the year after that which can get pretty wackily fantastic and where governments can pretty much just make stuff up if they want because, after all, they’re just projections. Our best guess is the consensus estimate of the experts we consult, et cetera, et cetera. By the time the year after next actually gets here and that thing that none of the experts foresaw has gone sideways to throw the projections out of whack, well, then government can throw up its hands and say: who knew?

Let’s just accept that those projections for fiscal 2014-15 – that provincial revenues will be \$10 billion higher than they are today without so much as a penny in tax increases, that the streets will be paved in gold, and it won’t matter if there’s a water shortage because we’ll all be swimming in milk and honey – are just stuff the government made up this time. Let’s just set that part of the budget aside for a minute and focus on the part that I call the actual budget.

I think the government has got the actual budget for the next 12 months largely right. Here’s what I mean. The spending commitments made for the next 12 months on a \$400 monthly increase in

payments to AISH recipients, on raises for vastly underpaid PDD contracted agency workers, on access to primary health care, on education, on seniors reflect much of what the Alberta Party has heard from Albertans in our Big Listens, and they reflect much of what Albertans have been telling me for the last 10 years, both as an MLA and when I was in media, that they want from their government. Mr. Speaker, they've been trying to tell the government the same thing, of course.

Now, there are things the government missed. Alberta is a world energy leader, and the Alberta Party believes that the government needs to be more clearly committed to doing the things necessary to ensure that we can remain so. Mr. Speaker, that's about opening up new markets and getting pipelines built, yes. But it's also about a stable regulatory and royalty environment that provides stability and certainty and confidence to industry and to government in the public interest to insist and deliver on best practices, environmental stewardship, and continuous improvement in both.

One of the most productive ways to achieve the economic diversification that all parties in this House seem to agree Alberta needs is to foster a culture of entrepreneurship. To support such a culture, the Alberta Party is committed to providing a zero per cent small-business tax rate for all new business start-ups for their first three years.

There is new money committed in this budget to the establishment of three family care clinics as pilot projects. Indeed, we see that there is quite a bit of new money committed to health care. What is not so obvious is a clear commitment to ensuring that everyone is able to easily access a primary care network or a clear commitment to preventive care. Keeping the person healthy is cheaper than treating the person who is sick. We need to shift the culture of our health care system and our health care thinking from the reactive practice of medicine more to the proactive prevention of disease and injury.

We think this government is still struggling to accept that the kids have grown up and want to go out on their own. Our local governments – cities, towns, counties, and municipal districts – make many of the decisions and provide much of the infrastructure and many of the services that have the most direct daily impact on our lives. Yet for all the talk of all the funding this government will provide to local governments, it still amounts to dad giving the kids an allowance and lending them the keys to the car. Yes, it's a bigger allowance than they'd get if Mr. Manitoba down the street was their dad and, yes, from time to time they even get to drive the Lexus, but it's still an allowance, and the kids are adults. If the kids invite dad over for breakfast, dad ought to do the proper thing and go, not boycott breakfast because the kids criticized his budget.

Local governments deserve to be formally recognized as an equal order of government, and education can benefit from the same kind of emphasis on local control. The Alberta Party is committed to decentralizing decision-making with regard to the construction, operation, and disposition of school facilities. Neither Calgary nor Camrose needs help from Edmonton in understanding what their kids need.

For years the PCs have shown that they don't have the ability to listen effectively or the courage to implement what Albertans say they want. This has been reflected in their water for life strategy, the Inspiring Education report, the report of the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, and pretty much anything to do with the land-use framework.

Economically actual provincial budgets concern themselves with the next 12 months. Politically this actual budget has to get the PCs through the next 12 weeks or less, which leads us back to

the second part of this budget, that contains the projections of another full-on boom within two years while all around us economies are ending up in the ditch. Now, Mr. Speaker, I suppose you could debate those rosy projections and the question of whether the government that came up with them was smoking something and, if so, whether they imported it from B.C. or grew it here at home and, although they don't mention it in this budget, have a secret plan to legalize or decriminalize and tax – oh, wait a minute. I forgot. That's a federal responsibility. But the projections in this budget don't matter. Why? Because as soon as this budget is passed, the government is going to call an election.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Party believes that the budgeting process itself must change. Not only does this mean zero-based budgeting to ensure that a thorough review of provincial spending is conducted, an idea that we're pretty glad to see this government bring forward, actually, but a complete overhaul of the way budgets are built and planned. First and foremost, budget cycles should extend beyond election cycles. An election cycle is typically four years. When a government manages its finances over a one-, two-, or three-year phase, it ends up making too many decisions in its own self-interest rather than in the public interest.

I don't care who's in power: PCs, Liberals, Wildrose, New Democrats, us. Even if the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster changes his mind about not running again and forms the Saskatchewan party of Alberta – I think their chances of success are, you might say, borderline, but what do I know? When the budget cycle is shorter than the election cycle, any government will make decisions designed to enhance its own re-election chances, a lot like this budget, Mr. Speaker. A five-year budget cycle puts Albertans first.

The construction of the budget should be an open, collaborative, consultative process extending over several months, giving citizens a real chance to contribute and to understand the final result. The people need to be included in setting priorities and planning the budget on an ongoing basis so that the budget reflects their needs and their values. Where and when it doesn't, because it won't always, they may not like the result, but at least they'll understand how we got there. You can't do that authentically in a two-week cabinet tour of Alberta, weeks before the budget is released.

We believe that even though this government has got a lot right in the actual budget for the next 12 months, its motivation for doing so was not long term but short term, winning an election within the next 12 weeks. Here, however, is what does matter about the part of the budget which will follow the election. Throughout his budget speech the Minister of Finance repeatedly returned to another theme that I've been hearing from Albertans for the last decade or more and which is now loud enough that the government has concluded it finally has to at least pay lip service to it. We have got to start saving our nonrenewable resource revenues and stop wasting our inheritance. In that speech there was much talk about the need to start saving, about the need to generate more sustainable, predictable revenue streams, and about the need to have an authentic province-wide conversation with Albertans about what that should look like. This means that after the election, they're going to want to talk to you about possibly putting your taxes up.

I agree. We need to talk. The Alberta Party caucus was the first to propose this conversation a year ago. We have said repeatedly that to get this government's finances on a sound footing so that the next generation will be better off than we are, not worse off, we all need to discuss what programs and services we expect from our government, how to save for the long term and how much to save, and if there's a shortfall between what we're paying in taxes

today and what it costs to deliver the programs and the services that we demand, what we're prepared to do to make up the difference.

3:50

It's not going to be an easy discussion, but Albertans are smart, tough, inventive, and focused on solutions. Albertans are the people who are ending homelessness. We know this province has almost unlimited potential, and we know we've come through a decade or more of being led by politicians who set the bar far lower than what we the people are capable of achieving.

Through you to the people of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the Premier will try to convince you that she needs a mandate from you to take you through that conversation, but she doesn't. By law she has almost another year to go before she has to call that election. If she's truly serious about holding a province-wide big listen, she has up to 11 months to have that conversation with you now. Then she can go to the polls and seek your approval to set Alberta on a new and more stable course, a course you've helped design. That would be doing politics differently, Mr. Speaker. That would be putting Albertans first.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is again available should anybody wish to question the previous speaker or make a comment.

Seeing no one, then I would ask if there are any other speakers to Government Motion 7. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege and a pleasure to stand and respond to . . .

Mr. Hancock: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Point of Order Speaking Order in Budget Debate

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, under the normal rules of the House under 13(2) I'd be interested in your ruling with respect to recognizing this speaker. This is the budget motion, which is typically a framing motion so that the Minister of Finance can deliver the budget, and then the leaders of the opposition parties respond to the budget. That's the custom and practice of the House that we follow every year, and we don't normally have intervening speakers. We normally allow for the Leader of the Official Opposition to proceed and then the representative of the second, third, and fourth parties to respond to the budget motion. This is the framing motion for that. If it's going to be a budget debate motion open to the whole House to participate, that would be a different process, which we could engage in, but it would be a change in the normal procedures and practice of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Is the hon. member from the Wildrose Party wishing to rebut?

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, if I may, you know, it's very interesting to hear the Government House Leader talk about process. I saw the process he believed in yesterday. On from Thursday I didn't have time to get to Introduction of Bills in regard to a private member's bill, and then we wanted to get some unanimous consent so we could revert to the Orders of the Day, which was private member's bill debate, which I consider something that's very, very important for members of this

government, and then go on to motions at 5 o'clock. This same Government House Leader turned it down.

You know, he's starting to talk about process, and I just find that if it's good for the goose, it's not necessarily good for the gander. If it's good for the government, it doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be good for anybody else. I look forward to hearing your ruling.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, if we're going to talk about process, let's talk about what's fair for everybody. Yesterday was an unbelievable example of how this government does not believe in democracy. We continually see that on a daily basis. We're seeing it again today, what's happening with the AUMA because they're arguing and the government has decided: we're not going to go to breakfast because they were critical of us on the budget.

I'll look forward to your ruling. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: We've heard from the party. Thank you.

Hon. members, there is no hard, fast, steadfast rule that says that only certain people can speak to this particular government motion. However, the hon. Government House Leader is correct. There has been a tradition that has been respected in the past, and I was looking forward to that, which is why I sent a note to Parliamentary Counsel about 10, 15 minutes ago asking for clarification just in case this question should come up.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie was generous to leave a few minutes on the table, and another member rose to speak at my request for anyone who wants to rise, so I recognized him. We will hear the rest of his speech.

However, to the government members, as you well know, you have the option to adjourn debate at any time, and if you wish to speak on the process thereafter with other members opposite, I would invite you to do so.

For the moment the chair has recognized the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and we'll look forward to hearing his comments.

Debate Continued

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for your gracious inclusion. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Government Motion 7, the response to the budget. Indeed, there is much to be grateful for in our wealth and our prosperity in this province. I would say that this budget represents a generous, perhaps overly generous, response to this challenge that we face to ensure that Albertans have the best services in the country, that we protect the vulnerable in our society, that we develop our resources in a responsible way, and that we ensure that our children are not compromised in the future by our spending today relative to the needs of tomorrow.

This Premier has indicated very clearly in this budget that there are many issues that are actually hold the line and that she is doing more of the same that this government has been doing over the last decade at least. The government is banking on high resource revenue despite one of the most unstable times in the world. There's a danger again that we are creating the conditions for continued instability in those most crucial of human services like education, health care, postsecondary education, seniors' care, the supports for people with disabilities. There's no clear stability in our budget because it's continuing to be at least one-third dependent on an unstable resource revenue.

We're now living, then, at the expense of our children's future, and I think it's time for us as a government on all sides to say yes to some more aspects of sustainable financial planning, sustainable environments, sustainable energy development, and

sustainable human services based on a revenue stream that is stable. We need to say yes to better planning for both capital and maintenance budgets in this very heavily infrastructure-intense province. We need to say yes to restoring trust in our relationships both within the human services programs that we provide and with Albertans, and we need to say yes to a more open and transparent communication around what is real and what is not real in the way we are working with people and the environment.

There is no single answer to restoring trust in a government that has been at it 41 years and created all kinds of debt, personal debts and relational debts, and obligations, but a good start would be to have an honest conversation with staff, with Albertans about areas that are not working in our systems, that are not efficient, that are not effective. Measuring outcomes is surely one of those, and this government is talking about results-based budgeting, which is an excellent start. It cannot end there. I mean, results are very difficult to measure. In many subtle ways the human dimension is paramount. If we have no trust, if we have no significant ability for people in an organization to actually have their voices heard, if there is a sense that people will be intimidated or punished in some way for criticizing or suggesting change, then we will not have the kind of processes that will provide the results that this government continues to talk about.

There needs to be not only transparency but accountability. There need to be clear, measurable goals in which people can not only be seen to be performing but also be held accountable for shortages on those goals and action needs to be taken commensurate with the failure, whether that's a remedy for the inadequate performance, or it may mean moving that person out of the bureaucracy instead of promoting them or having them leave with a huge severance package. There's a tremendous cynicism that comes with a government that doesn't really do the tough work of serious management that's based on targets, evaluation, and then commensurate action when standards are not met.

4:00

I would emphasize that because results-based management doesn't take into account the fact that we have been underperforming for decades. We now have a workforce that is profoundly demoralized primarily because the bosses are not doing their jobs. They are not holding senior people accountable. They are not ensuring that there is a transparency and a subsequent accountability for those who are not meeting targets, and there is a loss of faith in the whole system.

A lazy and incompetent government, then, results in failure to analyze carefully the really long-term as well as short-term risks and benefits. It fails to budget adequately for seniors' care, as we've seen, and for public health care in a sustainable way, for action on poverty, for example, which costs us today. If we believe this thoughtful report of last week, it costs us today \$7 billion to \$9 billion every year, not to mention the suffering and loss of mental health and physical health that some of these folks experience as a result of not being given the resources, the supports, and in some cases the education and the job opportunities that would result.

We have a double loss, then, when we fail to actually budget for a stable, educated, healthy population – I'm really talking about prevention, Mr. Speaker – a budget that doesn't actually have the capacity to measure the impact of prevention, of fewer people addicted, fewer people in the criminal justice system, fewer people seeking medical care, fewer people on supports for independence or Alberta Works programs. This government doesn't measure that, so it's difficult for them to appreciate that those kinds of

results can result in tremendous cost savings and in a tremendous increase in productivity for this province.

People simply, as I've heard it across this province, want to know and have confidence that their elected representatives are responsibly investing their hard-earned tax dollars in evidence-based policies. Use evidence. What we see here is policy-based evidence being created. Once an ideological party decides where they want to go, what they want to do, then they pull in some researcher who will comply with their conclusions and in some way support unsustainable kinds of policies: an unsustainable energy future; an unsustainable environmental monitoring and enforcement system that is grossly underfunded and has lost the respect of the world; an underfunded community development system in this province that doesn't recognize the tremendous opportunities for strengthening community associations and building upon their capacity to maximize and multiply their efforts through citizens who are engaged, optimistic, committed to a brighter future for their community, for their children, and for their seniors throughout their lifespan.

Those are a few thoughts about a budget that seems to be more of the same and doesn't really address the stable foundation. I think Albertans and economists, frankly, from across the country and across the world have said that we should be doing better. We should be drawing on the resources of our population, providing a stable revenue stream that can ensure that the kind of basic, first-world expectations are being met in caring for people, for education, for health care, moving towards a more diverse energy mix and a more robust postsecondary and innovation approach that would actually move us towards a knowledge economy, towards more sustainable energy and environmental practices, and actually leave our children a strong legacy of both good policy and a financial foundation that's based on real payment for our lifestyles for today instead of borrowing, without consent really, from our future and selling off our topsoil, as so many have described it so well.

A related area that the budget alludes to – and I must give some credit – is ESL and new Canadians and the commitment to stronger investment in new Canadians. We have to do better, and we have to credential many of these people in a more timely way so that they can be both productive and healthier in themselves and in their families, working in the professions for which they've trained. I will give credit to a recognition of the need for more serious supports and targeted supports for new Canadians, who came here. We need them desperately to man our various developments and services and products that we are creating for ourselves and the world.

My final comment, I guess, Mr. Speaker, would relate back to my initial comments that Albertans are hungry for a government they can trust, for a government that looks long term rather than short term, that thinks public interest as well as private interest, that thinks about a stable revenue source, that provides for the very foundations of a healthy, civil society in which people can participate, can give their opinions with confidence and feel that they are being heard, and can help to create the kind of prosperity, health, and sustainability that all of us deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to question.

If not, the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unless the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster wishes to address it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. It's an interesting position that I find myself in, Mr. Speaker, obviously, having been a member of government, now sitting over here and listening carefully to the opposition. While the budget is written in black and white, it is very clear that people see different things in the same budget, and they can interpret how they so please. That's an incredibly important part of the democratic process.

We are so very fortunate to be in Alberta. I for one have never ever been ashamed of the fact that Alberta is geographically located in an oil-rich zone, that we have some of the most productive forests and farmlands in the world. That's why people came here. That's why they are continuing to come here. Quite honestly, there is no one that I know that has the magic wand that can automatically open up this incredibly diverse puzzle that Alberta is with its 3 and a half million people and fit another 60,000 or 70,000 people in every year without significant changes.

While I can certainly accept that change can sometimes be difficult, it's probably what drives us. We know we have to continue to keep ahead of our competitors. I think that probably Albertans accept that we will be held to a higher standard, not because we're different but because we have the financial resources to do so, and that's all right, too. Challenging people to use their resources wisely is not only okay; I think it makes them better. I do want to say briefly, Mr. Speaker, that I find it unfortunate that we resort to somehow using the bureaucracy as a whipping boy for our financial problems.

One thing I learned in my years up here is that the people that work for the Alberta government – for us, for you and me, and for all the taxpayers of Alberta – generally work extremely hard. I have seen people in the civil service that are working 16, 17 hours a day and occasionally, when they're in a budgeting cycle, even more. Their weekends become ours, not theirs. Their children become the latchkey kids, like many of ours have become, yet they're just doing exactly what we ask them to do. For many of them, I can't imagine the pressures you have when you are a senior administrator in children's services or in health care when something goes wrong, but I can tell you that they are as emotionally attached to the people of Alberta as we believe we are. I don't think it helps when we use the civil service as the solution to the problem. They are what we will use, Mr. Speaker, to work our way through the problems.

4:10

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there isn't another place in the world that wouldn't die to have our problems. We have problems of excess, baby. One only has to watch the news right now and see Greece, a country with some history, that is just kind of a magical place. The people of Greece are burning down their own buildings and destroying what was the cornerstone of democracy because someone else has had to tell them: "You got it wrong. You were too long on the spending, too short on the resources." No one was looking out for future generations and the pickle they've got themselves in and the way that people can come to believe that it was their right to be subsidized by the hard-working people of Germany, France, and other countries.

We're nowhere near there, Mr. Speaker, and I know we won't be there. I think it's important that when government budgets, they remember that we tax people's money. That's what we do. That's what we spend. We ought to remember that we don't tax the morals. I don't think the budget should become a debate on the different moral stands that we take with regard to endeavours that the government may have.

I certainly do expect that everyone in here will do everything they can as we go through the deliberations to make sure that the budget is fully debated. The people of Alberta, who probably are less interested in this than we would even imagine, would like to get on with work and continue to go home to their children, be able to pay for their house, car, the odd vacation, and bring their relatives and family members to enjoy what we take for granted here, probably the luckiest place in the world.

In many ways I feel I've been one of the luckiest people in the world to have the opportunity to live here with my family, and I look forward to the debate as we go forward. I want to thank you for letting me interrupt and for giving me the chance to speak, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to comment or question.

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the Committee of the Whole is ready to commence its proceedings.

Bill 1 Results-based Budgeting Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any speakers at the committee stage? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise on Bill 1, what on the face of it looks like a very responsible and sensible and important approach to budgeting. It's been raised many times in the House that some of us would have assumed that this was part of any responsible management system for both a company and a government that's trying to deal with its responsibilities to either shareholders in one case or citizens in this case.

It's touted as a results-based budgeting process or zero-based budgeting, going back to zero each year and assessing what programs and what salaries and what benefits are accruing from our budgeting process to date. It suggests that it would be a comprehensive review, and there may well be external consultants employed to review this. I think that's helpful, especially given the tendency for all of us to see the rosy side of our own work. However, it does mean more costs, and one has to consider that in terms of the overall efficiency of the budget.

Albertans, too, need to be part of seeing the details of how we are spending our money, and of course they seldom do because it's been such a complex and, I think, inordinately obscure process. Even the opposition can't get clear answers on a budgeting process that has large line items without significant breakdown. The ministers deftly avoid answering very specific questions about specific line items, whether it be new policy implementation or bonuses for staff without clear criteria for how these bonuses can be given out. So forgive us for being a little bit cynical about what this might mean in terms of change for this government.

Certainly, results are important. There's no question that we have to be measuring our activities based on what kind of changes occur. Hopefully, we're looking at changes in Albertans' abilities, in Albertans' opportunities, in Albertans' environment, in Albertans' outcomes from interaction in the health system, in Albertans' expectation of life, in Albertans' productivity and not based solely on activities and defined as outcomes or results within a particular department. One has to ask the question: results of what and compared to what? Are we simply comparing to last year, or are we actually going to compare those results to other jurisdictions and the best standards in the world? If we're not, we're spinning our wheels and fooling ourselves.

Surely, as I've mentioned earlier in this House, we cannot ignore the process that's happening within departments in getting those results. If we are demoralizing people, if we are not following fair process, if we are intimidating people in the process of doing our work in this government service, if we are ignoring and disrespecting people in the workforce, this may not show up in results, especially results compared to last year. I'm thinking specifically of recent surveys done in the emergency medical services system that show a hugely demoralized emergency medical service declining year over year. I've seen the same in Human Services, at least in the children and youth services reports, that show a declining morale in Alberta Human Services based on survey results.

How can one even begin to talk about results if the morale in a department is continuously going down? What does that say about the process of carrying out the work of a particular department? We have to get serious about, again, following good management principles. If we're serious about getting better results and comparing them to the world's best results, the standard of the day, then we also have to look at the processes that are going on within the departments.

Let me take health care, for example. Are we going to measure the number of people treated, or are we going to measure the quality of how those people were treated? How do we combine the measurements of access when we're waiting up to 40 weeks, 50 weeks for a hip or a knee replacement and a gentleman in one case waiting seven years for a kidney transplant at the age of 40 and seeing his life pass before him? How are we measuring the cost benefits and opportunities that that money could have been spent in a particular way to achieve perhaps slightly different but better results? We have to have a very sophisticated measuring system that actually measures what it is we want to see change.

We also have to understand for the well-being of the staff, the people in the departments that are carrying out these tremendous services for Albertans, that they are feeling valued, are recognized for their need for ongoing education, are being acknowledged in terms of their performance for improving and challenging systems that are not working for all Albertans.

4:20

It's hard to argue with a results-based approach to budgeting. There's no question that that needs to be part of the mix in any responsible management of public resources and provision of human services or monitoring of an environment. The big question is: can we trust a government that has for so long neglected many of these dimensions of success and hasn't set clear goals, hasn't got clear indicators of success in place? I can speak very confidently in relation to the health care system, where measuring numbers and turnover is simply not acceptable when we see the cost per service as the highest in the country for health services in Alberta and, again, see the morale of people and their

confidence in the leadership progressively going down over the last decade.

A big part of the reason I'm in politics today is that I've heard from so many in the public and in the professions that express their frustration at the lack of basic monitoring and accountability in the systems that are supposed to be serving Albertans. And by that I mean not just firing people who aren't doing their job – and it may come to that – but providing the adequate retraining and redirection and remedy to those who are not managing their people well, not managing the setting of goals and the monitoring of the goals of that process well and, therefore, not being held accountable for the sacred trust we've been given by Albertans to manage their resources and, in fact, their very well-being in the short term and the long term.

If I may, I'll just close with a remark about the longer term management. If we focus so closely on results from this year over next year, we will miss the longer term commitment that has to be there for a more sustainable environment, a more sustainable health care system and workforce, people that believe in where we're going and put a hundred per cent of their energy and their commitment into making the systems work better.

I would not want to leave this discussion without ensuring that we are very clear that short-term results-based decision-making is part of what got us into this problem. We're not seeing the long-term energy needs of this province. We're not looking at the longer term results in terms of an environment that is being daily compromised. We're not seeing the long-term impact of a poverty reduction program that is not addressing in any serious way the huge cost of our failure to deal with single moms, educational and learning disabilities in children, behavioural problem in kids, mental health problems, addictions. By not dealing with those issues, which would be a short-term increased cost, we are actually failing in the long-term well-being of the province and comprising the kind of results-based budgeting that I think this Premier probably wants in her heart of hearts.

That said, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to propose an amendment to Bill 1 that has to do with accountability, that actually establishes within one year of coming into force a special committee of the Legislative Assembly to comprehensively review how this results-based budgeting process actually works. It involves extra cost. Will it involve extra benefit?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. If you could just present the page with copies that can be distributed. We will for the record refer to this as amendment A1. Hon. member, if you would just give us a moment to have it distributed. We'll take the original here. Thank you. Then we'll invite you to proceed with your discussion of this amendment.

I'm assuming everyone has a copy now. Yes? We'll let the member proceed, then.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The foundation of Liberal thinking around all kinds of production of goods and services is around evidence. Whenever we make a decision, it's very clear that if we don't measure the impact of what we've done, we have not done a job. Everything we do has risks and benefits. If we don't understand at the end of the day what the results of a change in direction are, then we simply will not make decisions that have a lasting and changing value.

This amendment on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is results-based budgeting amendment 1, we could call it. It reads:

3.1(1) Within one year of the coming into force... a special committee established by the Legislative Assembly shall commence a comprehensive review of the results-based budget process.

(2) The committee's review shall include recommendations for the establishment of an independent officer of the Legislature whose duties would include reviewing budgetary processes of the government.

Finally,

(3) The committee shall submit its report to the Legislative Assembly within one year after beginning the review.

Again, it speaks to state-of-the-art management principles. If we're going to change something that is ostensibly going to produce greater effectiveness or efficiency, surely we should measure the impact of that. Are we actually spending more money, and are we getting results from that as a result of this new approach? One would hope so. Again, there is no guarantee that anything we do is going to improve effectiveness and efficiency unless we measure it and hold ourselves accountable to both one another and the public.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

To the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I find this an interesting one. I wasn't able to look it up on the Internet quite as fast as I wanted to – I thought the hon. member would talk a little bit more – but the federal government, I believe, has an independent auditor by the name of Page, if my memory is correct.

Anyway, I think this is an interesting amendment to Bill 1. I certainly am not in favour of Bill 1 with its current concept. I commend the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for his astuteness in looking at auditing and ensuring that we're using our dollars wisely. I guess this is very brief and isn't expanding much, but some of my questions would be because in opposition – and each of us over here understands this – the line items that we get are painfully inadequate to look over and to make any decision or to make any comments, really, on how the money is being spent. I think that in this there needs to be a more comprehensive expansion on, you know, what books we're actually going to be able to see, that this independent government individual would have better access but, more importantly, that the committee would have better access to have an in-depth study of the budget and be part of the actual process of the results-based budgeting.

I'm not sure. Like I say, these things always get thrown out quickly. I wish I would have had a little bit more time to prepare and read this and do a little bit of research.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 1, the Results-based Budgeting Act, is painfully inadequate, and there need to be some amendments in order to expand that and to have some parameters on what they're trying to achieve. The short fact of the matter is that the government's budget is the result of their studying of it. Now they're trying to put it in this budget with this bill, saying that we're going to have a results-based budget. Well, what have they been doing, then, before now?

With this amendment, which I would be in favour of, I think that we have some parameters here now to see how we are going to actually go through a process, a comprehensive review to see the results of how our tax dollars are being spent. That's really our responsibility here as elected members, to ensure that tax dollars are spent wisely. I would argue that the differences in this House, really, should come down to the debate on the priorities. Should we be spending more money in, you know, Education? Should we be spending less money in Transportation?

I think that we would all agree – perhaps I have a few colleagues here that won't agree with this – that we need to balance our budget yearly. I mean, there are times, you know, like in 2008 when we had a major crash. Those are years where perhaps government needs to carry on. It might have that one-year dip, but to go on for five years with deficit budgeting is just wrong. It's not sustainable. It shouldn't be going forward. Somehow there needs to be a process where elected members can come together on a committee, go over these things, and agree – we might disagree – and vote on where we want to spend the money; like I say, more in health care, more in education, less in justice. The criteria needs to be that we need to balance the budget, much like municipal government. They sit down around the table, and they'll go for hours and hours and days on end on the process of the results of what they've put down.

4:30

Bill 1 is inadequate. In just saying, "Oh, it's going to be results based," well, that's exactly what this budget is. This one here, A1 – I didn't write that down when you said that, Mr. Chair; it's A1 – is asking:

3.1(1) Within one year of the coming into force of this Act, a special committee established by the Legislative Assembly shall commence a comprehensive review of the results-based budget process.

(2) The committee's review shall include recommendations for the establishment of an independent officer of the Legislature whose duties would include reviewing the budgetary processes of the government.

(3) The committee shall submit its report to the Legislative Assembly within one year after beginning the review.

I think this is a step in the right direction. I feel, though, that it's not a complete step. Like I say, he's got my thinking process going here now. We really need to have some more amendments that would actually enable this committee to be part of the results-based budget process along with an officer of the Legislature.

Anyway, it's innovative. That's what we need, some new thinking, because this government certainly is lacking it, and this Bill 1 certainly shows that lack of innovation. By simply creating a bill, they think that they can create the illusion that now they've got great results from their painfully poor budget, which they've brought forward and that will be debated here over the next month.

I'd just like to speak in favour of this. It's an interesting concept, and it would be interesting to see if the government has any comments on this.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, please, on the amendment.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to speak, actually, in support of this amendment made by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar. The bill as written so far is much more of a public relations exercise than anything. The government is attempting to use this as a cloak to say that we're going to be fiscally responsible from now on by reviewing budgets and reviewing programs and reviewing the like. It's been said here before – and I'll say it again just for the sake of the record – that if the government hadn't been doing this already, it begs the question: what the heck have they been doing?

The act as written provides no guarantees, no assurances, no outcomes, no priorities, or, in a sense, any direction as to where this results-based budgeting process will lead. Also, it again is happening behind closed doors. How do we know whether the

results of this process are actually being accomplished? As I said at the beginning, it's an exercise in messaging, and whether it's successful or not, I'm not so sure.

But, hey, I guess the long and the short of this amendment is that it's trying to make this current act have some use and effect, some particular teeth to it, that it may actually make things better here in Alberta by applying a special committee made up of the Legislative Assembly and that actually does a review of this process. This bill also includes recommendations for the establishment of an independent officer of the Legislature whose duties would include reviewing the budgetary process of this government and submitting a report to this honourable House for us to review and look at and distill as to whether we're getting value for money or production from our resource revenues, from our tax revenues and the like in providing services to the citizens of Alberta. You know, it behooves us, if we're going to have a bill, that it actually does something. That's why I would be in support of it.

Obviously, budgeting processes are very important things unless you're going to totally discount the role of government. You need police services, fire services, ambulance services, the provision of medical services, a publicly funded education system, and the like. These are not easy priorities to manage, nor are they always easy to budget for. In particular, given our particularly volatile revenue streams at this current time, our reliance on oil and gas revenue, that is, in my view, short term and short sighted, we should be contributing more from the public purse to pay today's bills.

I find much wiser a pay-as-you-go philosophy of having people actually pay for the services they use, of people actually paying taxes for the health care, for the public education, and for, basically, the public good that we enjoy. I think we should ask more of our citizens to pay today for those things they're using instead of borrowing other people's money or future generations' money, which is the oil and gas reserves, unless we think it's a principled decision to spend all this wealth in one generation, which we've shown over the course of the last 25 years an ability to do.

We've spent \$200 billion to \$250 billion in petroleum revenues without saving a dime. I think anyone would say that in the long run this is not sustainable or whether it's morally or ethically correct to have actually done that. I would say that a far more conservative principle, a far more results-based budgeting principle, is to say: "No. We as a society are going to pay for what we use and save for the long run and use some of those revenue streams to build a heritage trust fund, like Mr. Lougheed envisioned, to go forward and allow us to have something left when the oil and gas is gone." I think that to argue otherwise is simply not common sense, nor is it logical, nor is it morally or ethically correct to the future generations.

If they apply some of these principles, what I've just described, to an actual budgeting process, to actually strike a committee to make this bill better, what I'd like to see is us looking at our revenue streams, looking at our results, and actually developing a fair taxation policy that represents not only what we need today but what we're going to need tomorrow, when the oil eventually runs out or the world moves on from oil, which will most likely be the case far before the oil runs out.

I thank you for your time, for allowing me to speak to this amendment, one that I think will bring some focus to the bill and maybe some results forward for the Alberta people. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak against the amendment. It's ironic that in a House where we've just had speeches relating to the budget, most of which talked about how the budget should be balanced and that we shouldn't spend more money, we see the deputy leader of a party that's constantly chastising the government for spending too much speaking in favour of setting up yet another committee and another process that will yet cost more money when, in fact, we have a process in place already to do exactly this.

According to Bill 1 under section 3(1), "The President of Treasury Board . . . shall, no later than October 1 of each year, beginning in 2012, table in the Legislative Assembly a report that sets out the progress of the review."

We also have in our standing orders policy field committees. When anything is brought before the House that relates to the area that the policy field committee is responsible for, it falls within the jurisdiction of that policy field committee, so very easy for the policy field committee to determine that they would like to review that report and make comment on that report. Reports that are tabled in the House can be referred to the committee. So there's a process in place for the House to do this not once, as proposed by the amendment, but on an ongoing basis, and I would hope that the policy field committee responsible would indeed undertake that.

4:40

Now, the House could decide, if it wished, to make the change and refer it to the Public Accounts Committee, you know, if we wanted to add to the role of the Public Accounts Committee, but without doing anything, it does fall within the purview of the policy field committee to which the Ministry of Finance and the Treasury Board are reportable and, indeed, where estimates would go if they weren't otherwise directed to the House. This is already covered very well, not just on a one-time basis but on an ongoing basis, and therefore the amendment is not only a costly addition but unnecessary.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hinman: Well, I appreciate the Government House Leader getting up and giving those erroneous statements. Nowhere did I say that the government should spend more money. I talked about priorities. This government obviously is oblivious to the idea that when you budget, you actually prioritize your money.

He talked about the policy field committees. We don't have access to any of the information. It's very limited, Mr. Chair. It's ridiculous. It's almost pompous for the Government House Leader to get up and make such comments like there's an ability for the opposition to get any review of any of the budgetary items other than what's in the actual budget, which anybody in the province has access to. We never see any contracts. We don't see the RFPs that go out. None of those things take place.

Again, the whole agenda of the policy field committees is run by the government. I mean, all of those areas are run by the government. They're protective. They're secretive. They're closed in. We can't ask for different documents and say, you know: let's see the requests for proposals on these billion-dollar power lines that this government purports that we need. You know, after 12 years of saying that it's critical, that the sky is falling, nothing has happened, yet there are no reports coming forward, Mr. Chairman. It's just ridiculous, from the statements that he made, to say, "Oh, the Wildrose deputy leader is in favour of running a deficit budget now" because we're looking at having someone accountable.

I mean, Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer that the federal government put in place in 2008, is the first one. It's interesting how critical he is of the government on how the government is spending their money or when they're unrealistic in their projections. I think that was the intent of this amendment. As I did say, if I would have known this was coming forward, I would have brought in another amendment for it, but it takes time, and we're not going to have that time. The debate will move on before an amendment would pass parliamentary approval.

I merely commented on the fact that we need a better system and not the government standing up and patting itself on the back for having a committee that they're going to present to this parliament and say: "Oh, look how great we've done in our budgeting, the results. Here's our report." This government receives report after report. I mean, they just had their critical transmission committee come and say how great and wonderful the government was to act on this critical need, Mr. Chair.

I have to stand up and correct the hon. Government House Leader in his comments that we want to increase the largesse of government, that we want to spend more money. This amendment is anything but that. The whole purpose of why they have Bill 1 and why this amendment to Bill 1 was brought forward is that we want to actually have some results-based financing. We don't have that. If this government thinks or even purports for a minute that they have it, then the results of their finance is that there are no cuts that can be made, that there's no largesse in the government anywhere, that there's no bloating of management in any of the departments, that every dollar has been covered.

They've had since October 1 to go through this budget. The Premier and her cabinet have all come forward and said that there are no cuts that can be made. That's ridiculous. There are many cuts that can be made. Sometimes in order to balance a budget, you actually have to pick and choose. "Can we go on two holidays as a family?" "No, only one." "So where are we going to go?" "Well, we don't have enough money. We're staying in Alberta, but we wanted to go to Disneyland or to Alison's Wonderland for a wonderful vacation." They don't have the money.

Mrs. Forsyth: To Jasper.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, a vacation to Jasper and to bring our future colleagues along.

Mr. Chair, it's offensive to Albertans that this government for the fifth year during record revenue has come up with this idea of results-based budgeting. I mean, it's comical when we look back at the last three years and realize what Bill 1 has been. Last year it was: "You know what? We kind of messed up, and what we need is an advisory council to the government." The Government House Leader just talked about not creating more bureaucracy and more counsel. Well, that's exactly what it was. Then we had a candidate for the leadership of his party get appointed to that nice position. The year before that, this government destroyed the oil and gas industry here. Did they ever apologize for that? No. They blamed it on world happenings beyond their control, which was in August '08, but they still implemented their faulty program on January 1, 2009.

Then for their budget in 2010 they said: oh, we need to pass this new, very important bill that's the Alberta Competitiveness Act. Why? Because all of the bills that they had passed had destroyed – we weren't competitive here in the province. We were losing industry. We were losing revenue. So they came up with these wonderful bills to try and put smoke and mirrors around their shortcomings, their fallibility in budgeting.

They think that because they write down a few little words on here, results-based budgeting, that Albertans are going to buy that. The result of proper budgeting, Mr. Chairman, would be a balanced budget. We've had five years to do it. It's doable. But each year that we don't, we dig ourselves deeper into a hole that will be tougher and will hurt more if we don't make the proper cuts now.

Something else needs to be done. Bill 1 isn't adequate in its current situation. This is a step in the right direction. Like I say, because of the process, we weren't privy to this amendment coming forward. I would have had another amendment to add some in-depth – I guess what I want to say is that all House members that would have access could actually go to the Finance minister and say: "You know, I want to see the requests for proposals on cataracts. I want to see these. Where are these decisions?" They'd actually have a committee of the Legislature that would have access to look at the results of the budget and where we're spending the money.

We have no access to that. We can't make any real comments on how or where they're spending the money because it's a line item budget. We need new computers. They're going to spend \$2.6 million. Where? How? Why? That's the extent of their debate. It's ridiculous. It's inadequate. It's incomprehensible that they would think that Bill 1 in its current condition is going to result in good budgeting going forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other speakers? Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair, I would also like to speak in favour of the amendment brought forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar. The intention of Bill 1 is that it essentially tasks the government to do a program review of all departments using a results-based budgeting process, leaving the term "results-based budgeting process" undefined, and then to report to the Legislature. So the amendment to Bill 1 is:

Within one year of the coming into force of this Act, a special committee established by the Legislative Assembly shall commence a comprehensive review of the results-based budget process.

Then it goes on further.

The committee's review shall include recommendations for the establishment of an independent officer of the Legislature whose duties would include reviewing the budgetary processes of the government.

So the independent officer will be reviewing the budget process on an ongoing basis.

The committee shall submit its report to the Legislative Assembly within one year after beginning the review.

This amendment is going to put teeth into Bill 1. We can have ongoing reviews of all the budget processes, and then we will know where we have gone wrong, where we have overspent, where we need to spend more, and where we need to cut back.

This amendment will force the government to have the budget processes and outcomes reviewed by an independent officer of the Legislature, similar to the federal Parliamentary Budget Officer. This will not only keep our spending in check; it will also produce better results if you pass this amendment, the rationale being the real improvements in efficiency, objectivity, and the possibilities obtained by the objective review of government programs by an independent officer of the Legislature as well as having a better budgeting process in place.

4:50

For those reasons, this amendment will give us an independent officer of the Legislature, and for those reasons I will favour this

amendment, Mr. Chair, because it will bring in transparency, efficiency, and objectivity. The process will be very, very transparent.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Are there any other persons wishing to speak to amendment A1 as presented moments ago?

Are you ready for the question, then?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're back to the main speakers list now on the bill, and I will recognize Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chair, thank you very much. I'm not sure how I feel about standing up and speaking about this bill, actually. I've thought about it over the weekend and as I drove home on Thursday night and when I drove up again on Sunday. You know, I try to rationalize where I've been, where I am today, and where I'm going. When I thought about Bill 1 that way, I thought about my time as a member, when I was with the government, and I think it was six and a half years as a cabinet minister and about the process that we went through budgeting and line-by-line items when the times were tough.

I remember doing exactly what the government is proposing, actually, way back when I was the Solicitor General. We had some rough roads, and the Premier at the time, Premier Klein, had sent out to all of the ministers at that particular time: pick your priorities. What's the most important thing in your department? I guess wants versus needs. That was in maybe 2001 or 2002. I can't exactly remember.

I've said in this Legislature before that if we had half the money the government has or even a quarter of the money the government has or a third of the money they have and the staff that they have to be able to do research, you know, I'm not sure where we'd be. With a limited budget a lot of the research is done by some very capable staff that we have in our small little caucus, but we end up spending hours upon hours doing our own research. As my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore has alluded, if we would have had just a little bit of time to do a little bit of research, it's amazing the debates that we could carry on in this Legislature.

You know, I look at this bill, and we've got a whole bunch of whereases.

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring that its programs and services are the right programs and services delivered in the right way to achieve the results that Albertans expect, in the most efficient and effective manner.

Mr. Chair, what on God's green Earth have they been doing for the last 40 years they've been in government? You know, you would think that as a cabinet minister and an MLA you'd be asking yourself: are we delivering the right way to achieve what's best for Albertans? It is beyond – absolutely beyond – my comprehension that the government would even have the nerve, honestly, to table a bill, to admit to Albertans that they've been screwing up for the last 40 years and that they really didn't know what they were doing prior. It's no wonder, as my colleague says, that we've got five years of deficits.

You know, let's make it real simple. I have to tell you that I was door-knocking this weekend on Saturday, and I talked to the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek about the Results-based Budgeting Act. I don't know if you know what it's like when you're talking to somebody and you're talking over their head or they're just not comprehending or understanding what you're

doing. They looked at me as if to say: lady, I have no idea what you're talking about, so why don't you keep it simple? So you go back to the simplicity of saying that it's like sitting around the kitchen table and deciding about your budget when your husband has had to take a drop in salary because it's either that or he loses his job. So you're making decisions on what is truly a want versus a need: do we still continue to have steaks three times a week, or do we all of a sudden realize that we have to go on to hamburger? It's such a simplistic idea of how we budget.

Then we go on to:

Whereas a comprehensive review of the Government's programs and services will ensure that those programs and services are continuing to achieve the best results and to support Albertans, communities and businesses in reaching their full potential.

Well, we have or had – I'm not even sure if we do any more – a three-year budget cycle, a process that would allow us after the first year of the budget to go back. You know, if you had an agency that was doing some work contracted from the government: are you doing the right thing, and are you getting results? Again, it's one of those things that you just shake your head and say: Albertans truly, truly are not going to buy into this. It's like my colleague said, where we had – oh, let's see – in 2011 the Asia Advisory Council Act. I'm not even sure, to be honest with you, if that bill has been proclaimed. Has it? Does anybody know?

An Hon. Member: No mention if it wasn't.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. So we're not sure if that bill is even proclaimed.

Then we go to 2010, the Alberta Competitiveness Act. It's another one of those. You have to be kidding me. I mean, normal Albertans, everyday Albertans – and that's the Tim Hortons Albertans – get it. They don't need a bill like the Alberta Competitiveness Act. They don't need a bill like the Asia Advisory Council Act. They just want us to do what they've elected us to do: represent their interests. I have to tell you that I door-knock every summer. I door-knocked last summer and door-knocked the summer before, and I don't remember any one of the good people of Calgary-Fish Creek saying: you know, Heather, we need an Asia Advisory Council Act.

I write an article every month for my web page, and it's called What's on Your Mind. I decided that I was just going to take a little step back in history and was going to read what I've been writing for the last year. The article is called What's on Your Mind because it's what the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek have told us for the last month. We track every phone call that comes into the office. We track every e-mail and fax that comes into the office and anybody that walks into the office. If I'm at the grocery store getting my groceries and somebody stops me and they want to talk about something about the government, every single one of those is tracked. When we get towards the end of the month, my staff does a graph and a printout and tells me exactly what the graph indicates as the number one priority for the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek.

I have to apologize to them because we've been busy getting ready for session, so I haven't written What's on Your Mind for the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek for the month of January. But I can tell you that it's the same thing that's been on their mind for the last nine months: health care, seniors, and then the third one will switch from education to infrastructure. I can tell you that in the month of December for the first time the .05-.08, whatever that piece of legislation was called, bumped everything off the map and took number one priority.

The government's role, quite frankly, and that of every single person in this Legislature as an elected representative is to listen to what they're hearing from their constituents and then go back and discuss it at the caucus table. The caucus then allows the cabinet to say: well, you know, out of 80 – I don't know how many MLAs they have because they keep losing them, but I think there are 62 now. I'm not sure, exactly. The representation of those 62 MLAs should be telling the government the direction of what they're hearing from the people who put them there and who elected them because that's their position.

5:00

We go on and we talk about:

Whereas the recommendations from such a review . . .

And I'm not sure what review they refer to. I guess it's the review of the government's program and services.

. . . can form a basis for future budget and policy decisions to achieve the best results for Albertans.

All nice. All wonderful. It makes you feel warm, and it makes you feel like the government is doing something, but then again you question what's happening, what they've been doing before.

Then we go on:

Whereas engaging Albertans is vital to determine what results they want and to validate the results achieved.

An unbelievable comment when you think about the fact that they just seemed to wake up on the date of February 2012, maybe one month or two months before an election, and they're talking about engaging Albertans and how vital it is. It's just arrogance, cockiness at its finest.

Then we go on:

Whereas an innovative, collaborative and engaged Alberta Public Service, working with purpose and pride, is committed to achieving results for Albertans and making a difference in their lives.

I'm not exactly sure what that even means, to be honest with you. If it's going back to maybe the comment that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster made earlier about the hard work that the public service does in this province, there's no question. I've been blessed, serving in two ministries, as the Solicitor General and as the minister of children's services. I said this last year when I was speaking in regard to the unbelievable job that the civil service did for me when I was the minister – and it's like the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster said – that they go absolutely way beyond the call of duty. It's amazing how they all pulled together when we were working on budgets or, for that matter, when we had a crisis in the department. Everybody worked together.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

We then go on to the review of the programs and services and exactly the role of the Treasury Board.

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

Again, you know, you have to wonder what Treasury Board was doing before. Up until a few months ago we had the President of the Treasury Board, and then we had another minister of something to do with Treasury Board. Since then we've just got the President of Treasury Board. What exactly has the President of the Treasury Board been doing for the last four years if he hasn't been doing a comprehensive review?

Mr. Chairman, I had the opportunity to sit on Treasury Board when I was a government member. It was a very, very good learning experience. I hadn't been elected that long, and it was at that time a very prestigious position to be sitting as a member of Treasury Board. The Treasury Board staff, as we're going through

this budget process, provide you with a very comprehensive review because of the fact that you have ministers coming to the table. They're wanting to have more money. They're arguing the fact of why their particular ministry should not take a decrease, should not stay the same, and most of the time should have an increase in spending. All of a sudden it seems like we're reinventing the wheel, or maybe this is one of those bills where we want everybody to think: under this new Premier we're changing how we do business.

I don't have a problem with that. The problem with the business that they're changing is something that they should have been doing for the last 40 years in regard to establishing budgets, determining priorities, and finding out what the right programs are, what the right services are, how you achieve the best results in what the government says is efficient and effective.

You know, I continue to think about this as I meet and engage with people out and about, and I really, really have trouble trying to rationalize and explain: well, I guess, the government hasn't been doing what they said they were doing, and now they've decided that maybe they should be doing this because it could be what Albertans want. We probably haven't been listening in the past, so now we'll tell them what they want to hear instead of asking what is really important to them.

We go on. They talk about the review process.

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

Well, Mr. Chairman, I really hate to sound repetitive, and I don't want to say, "I told you so", but honest to goodness, what the heck have they been doing for the last 40 years? I mean, it is where you have to shake your head over and over again and think, "I cannot believe that I'm standing up on the 14th of February debating the number one bill of the Legislature in the spring session, called the Results-based Budgeting Act" and try and comprehend what the government has been doing previously. I guess that from this they haven't been doing a very good job. Now, in the year 2012, they're going to change the whole budget process. They're going to start engaging Albertans, and more importantly they are going to start listening to Albertans, and that's very frightening.

We go down.

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

What external experts? When you have the hard-working people that work in many of the departments, what I call the front-line workers or the workers that are in the trenches, they know what needs to be done in their particular departments. They know what the priorities are for their departments. They know that if we're talking about Human Services, the number one priority for that particular department is protecting children. It's real simple. What they need to do is make sure that the children in this province are protected and especially that the vulnerable children that are apprehended under children's services are taken care of, that they've got some love, that they've got some access to things if they come into issues. It's not rocket science.

Then they go on to say, "Albertans will have the opportunity to participate in the review." What review, and who determines that review? Is it Treasury Board? Is it the members of the public service? Is it the external experts? I mean, Mr. Chair, we have some unbelievable people that work and are engaged within the different departments of the different ministries that do an

unbelievable job, and let's give them some credit. As someone who has sat in two ministries, who relied on the people that worked within those ministries to tell me as a new minister, really, what the priorities were for their ministry, who knows it better than them?

You go out. In both ministries when I was a minister, I travelled the province and talked to the corrections officers that were out there and talked to the police. Even when I visited the correctional facilities, I talked to the people that were incarcerated, the offenders, to see what was on their mind. The children's services minister covered every regional authority in the province from as far north that you could go to as far south, reached out to the aboriginal communities, did visits in Wabasca, went to Eden Valley, you know, went to Hobbema, went to Siksika, talked to the people there. That's what's all important about engaging Albertans.

5:10

For the government, quite frankly, to bring up a Bill 1 and put in all of these whereases, what they're going to do, is completely unacceptable. They are now saying to Albertans: we've never done this before, so will you just give us one more chance in our 41st year as this is what we should be doing? You know, instead of the government telling the people what they're going to do, maybe it's time that the people tell the government what they expect them to do.

As we go through the process of debating this particular motion, I'm looking forward to hearing the government stand up and rationalize why they're going to support this bill. With that, I'll sit down.

The Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, then.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I listened with some interest to my colleague on this side of the House and have listened to other people talk on this bill. We, interestingly, just had an amendment brought up from this side of the House to Bill 1 of this session, the act that's before us, that I think would have actually given this legislation some teeth and some purpose.

Starting on that, if we look at this bill, it purports to do great things, well, not really great things, but it essentially says: results-based budgeting. Clearly, this is a title meant, in my view, to produce some results in our budgets, actually have them produce results that are both economically viable as well as produce the services that a modern-day society actually utilizes, whether these programs are needed, wanted, or the like. That's what to me, actually, results-based budgeting would be.

If you go through the act, I don't see anything tangible that would lead to actually results-based budgeting happening. It's simply a platitude, more of a wish, more of a hope, more of a desire, more of a "we want this to happen" or "we're not going to make this happen." It provides no actual teeth to how this is going to happen. In fact, I've said it before, but why not? Redundancy is my strong suit. If they haven't been doing results-based budgeting before, one might ask what the heck they've been doing, and I think that's a fair comment when you really look at this bill. It purports to do a lot without doing anything.

To, I guess, the government's credit they have received quite a bit of play on this in the news media. People have sort of bought into this debate hook, line, and sinker, and it shores up their image as being fiscal hawks when we full well know it's really not much of a claim. If it helps them in that regard, I guess that's good for them. Whether this bill is actually good for the Alberta people,

that is another thing. I remain to be convinced. I'm hopeful that possibly some of the language in here may get to the ministers as well as their teams, and hopefully they will results-based budget from now on, which I guess means we're going to review the programs and see whether they're working for Albertans, again something I hoped they were already doing but apparently not.

I guess that, going forward, what I'd like to see out of our budgeting practices is more of an eye to balancing revenues with expenses and trying to look at a global picture of what we can do to provide essential services from governments, things like police, fire, ambulance, public health care, public education, and some of those things that, in my view, modern societies work better with, things that essentially make the trains run on time, so to speak, essentially allow societies to function at their highest productivity with the most people engaged and the most people supported in a reasonable fashion. For instance, many of these programs in society, I feel, are overarching. I think government has to take some direction in the organization of a society, and if done correctly, the government can provide efficiencies to what they were doing.

Essentially, sometime the rubber has to hit the road in terms of our spending, in terms of what we bring in on the revenue side from the taxpayer and what we currently rely on in fossil fuel resources. I've said this earlier, but in my view the last 25 years have shown that we can spend \$200 billion to \$250 billion in fossil fuel resources and not save a dime, okay? In my view, this is morally and ethically wrong. In my view, I don't believe it should be our *raison d'être* to spend every last dime of fossil fuel resources that come into the government coffers on providing services. I essentially think that if people want these services, they should have to pay for some of them themselves, okay? If they don't want these services, I guess that's going to be the time when the rubber hits the road, where we say: all right; we're going to cut these services.

That would be more moral and ethical than us simply spending all this money on keeping an artificially low tax base. That's essentially what we've done over the last 25 years, and in my view it may have been a road to electoral success, but it hasn't shown much leadership.

I'll say it here. You know, although our societies are structured differently, when books are written on how to run an oil and gas economy and what to do with the revenue streams, I think that when they compare what Norway has done to what we've done, there's no choice who did it better. They have \$600 billion in their kitty that they can now call upon when times are tough. We have \$15 billion, that essentially we saved before 1987.

I think that if this process, although I'm not sure it does anything, can lead to us getting sort of that commitment to saving, thus getting a commitment to paying as we go, a commitment to developing a fair taxation policy that recognizes that it's not in our best interests to spend every last dime of fossil fuel resources that comes into the government coffers on today's bills, then maybe this bill will have served its purpose. Until such time as I'm proven wrong, I think this has been a public relations exercise. To give the government its due, it's probably been a relatively successful public relations exercise, so I guess I'd give them some credit for that. Other than that, it's not of much consequence, not of much actual tangible relevance to seeing things done in a better, more manageable way. Although it's given us an opportunity to talk and lay some direction on the line, in my view it's maybe not the best use of a Bill 1.

5:20

Nevertheless, I thank you for the opportunity to discuss this

once again. I look forward to hearing the rest of my colleagues debate this. I don't know if I've heard anyone from the government side discuss this bill and hear from them how this is going to change the world or change how things are done. Maybe that would be a nice opportunity. We're all here. I think you guys all have to be here till 6 o'clock, so feel free to chime in, and we'll go from there.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to stand up and speak a little bit more about Bill 1, the Results-based Budgeting Act. I have to say that as the debate goes forward and a few more thoughts come to my mind, it really is disappointing. I can't help but think of Shakespeare: protest too much for an innocent man. I think that this government protests too much to be fiscal conservatives. Again, they went through the cycle of going into multibillion-dollar debt in the late '80s, early '90s. We struggled and came out of that up until 2005.

We then had a great boom for two or three years and were able to put a lot of money into the sustainability fund. I might say that the reason why they were able to do that is because there wasn't the capacity or the projects online that they could spend the money on fast enough. Thank heavens for that because if they could have found a dollar store to spend another dollar, I think they would have spent it. They bought up and did everything they could possibly get dibs on.

It's interesting that they bring this bill forward as Bill 1, and as I'd mentioned earlier in talking on the amendment, the last three Bill 1s have been somewhat comical almost, where they protest that they're something that they're not. They think that in order to tell Albertans, you know, that they're fiscal conservatives, they'll bring forward Bill 1 and make the big announcement.

It's interesting, though, how in the budget they projected such fantastic revenue over the next three years going forward, yet when you look back, they've had an incredible streak of revenue since, you know, 2003. Like I say, we've grasped our debt, been able to pay it off, put money in our sustainability fund, and then we've spent that money.

It was interesting also because action really does speak louder than words. Earlier today in question period the Government House Leader, Edmonton-Whitemud, was asked a question about protecting children on the farm, and he got up and said something. I wish that we could get *Hansard* quicker. He answered something along the line that bills and legislation aren't going to make our children safe, that it's what we've taught and how they're being protected.

Again, I want to say that the Government House leader is absolutely right. This bill and this legislation are not going to turn this government into a fiscally conservative government that balances the budget, so it doesn't matter whether this bill or the budget passes. It is not going to change the behaviour of this government, which is spend and spend more. I think they've forecasted very, very eloquently that they in the future want to tax and tax more, so they're going to take on that old saying, a tax-and-spend government, and they gleefully do that.

It's interesting that this government seems to have this concept at this point that Albertans are like spoiled children, that they can't have an idea of the bigger grasp of things and that if we don't spend this money, they won't vote for us. We have this desperate grab in this bill, Bill 1, stating: "You know, we're going to go through everything and review it, so vote for us. You can count on us."

You know, it's interesting that many times I've heard about

why democracies fail. Some people refer to it as the cycle of democracy. There's an individual that is somewhat credited – but, again, the debate always goes on – Alexander Fraser Tytler, who in 1770 wrote about the cycles of democracy. I want to read that, like I say, realizing that this isn't the real quote. It's evolved over the years. It's kind of eloquent, though. It's very, I think, relevant to the situation of democracies around the world right now.

A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government.

It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury with the result that a democracy always collapses over lousy fiscal policy, always followed by a dictatorship. The average world's great civilizations before they decline has been 200 years. These nations have progressed in this sequence: From bondage to spiritual faith; from faith to great courage; from courage to liberty . . .

And then we hit the top of the cycle.

. . . from liberty to abundance; from abundance to selfishness; from selfishness to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependency; from dependency back again to bondage.

It's an interesting quote. Like I say, to go back to the real question of why democracies fail, it's because the governments fail to balance their budgets. The governments fail to take on that responsibility of looking at the taxpayers' money and realizing how critical it is that they spend it appropriately and in the right areas.

Again, the crisis that we're going through around the world is this abundance of credit. We've sucked up this credit. The household debt is incredible in Canada and the U.S., in France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ireland. In all of these areas the bankers have been putting this out and allowing for easy credit and, basically, enslaving us to the point of: how are we going to pay it back? What's going to be the end result of this major deficit and debt that we're running into?

I remember – and this kind of dates me – that *Grease* was a popular movie when I was going to high school. We were having *Grease* days. An individual brought a greased pig into the high school. Everybody was trying to catch it to get rid of it. I think a pig is hard enough to capture just in its normal state, but when one is greased, you can't hang on to it. I look at this government and the struggle that they have. They've greased so many wheels and so many axles and so many whiny lobbyists that the harder they try to balance their budget or to hang on to their money, the slipperier it is. It flies out of their hands, and they're not able to do what they know they need to do.

But what's most distressing today, Mr. Chair, that's come out is the continuing bullying and intimidation by this government. It's reprehensible, and it's unacceptable. I didn't understand when the member was asking the question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs what the relevance of his question was. Then I find out that the minister had sent a letter to Linda Sloan, the president of the AUMA, and said: "You know what? We don't accept public criticism. You're wrong to do that." I'm paraphrasing. I could read the letter. I was quite blown away when I saw it. "And because of that, we're not going to come to your breakfast meeting on Thursday morning."

This, Mr. Chairman, is exactly the bullying and the tactics and the behaviour that I've been referring to from this government since November 2004. It's wrong. It's absolutely wrong, and it's unacceptable. Yet, as with any bully, they're so entrenched in it that they don't understand they're doing anything wrong. They

just think: “Well, this is the normal way of governing. Nobody should have the right to criticize.”

You know, I remember when I was out in Montreal for the first assembly of the Conservative Party of Canada. We were debating and deciding our policy and where we were going to go. Faron Ellis from Lethbridge College was there with our constituency at that time, our area. There were some people making some criticisms. You know, people say: “Oh, you shouldn’t criticize. You should offer better ideas.”

5:30

What is a critique? You know, as a coach you want to critique that athlete or that pianist or whatever and say: look, you need to change this, you need to do that. The important thing that Faron said to me that day was that criticism makes good organizations and good people better. And I thought about that a little bit. You know, that’s true. When my wife tells me that I’m not doing something – and I’m thinking of Valentine’s Day. Thank you very much for your support, honey, for the work that we do in here and not being able to be together this evening because I’m in Edmonton and you’re down south.

Mr. Chair, criticism, if taken in the right light, is a great help. I like people to tell me when I’ve done something wrong rather than to allow me to go on and keep repeating it. That’s not a good situation.

What’s also interesting that he added to that was that criticism also speeds up the demise of faulty organizations. So if you’re allowed to publicly speak about those things and then people see those criticisms publicly, it collapses poor organizations. And it doesn’t matter what area it is. Whether it’s government, whether it’s a charitable organization, whether it’s a nonprofit, criticism is important.

Yet this government wants to smother it and say it’s not allowable. Whether you’re a librarian and you criticize them, the response always is: you know, you need to toe the party line here, toe the government line because if you don’t, your funding is questionable. This is something that they do throughout the province in all areas, whether it’s education in telling the teacher to pull in the line. When they brought in the centralized superboard, they told all the health workers: if you speak out publicly, there are going to be consequences. We see Dr. Magliocco when he was sent the letter: this will jeopardize your career if you speak out and criticize publicly.

This government fails to understand the importance of public criticism. Fortunately, they can’t completely silence the opposition in this House, and we do have a few moments where we get to speak. Again, I found it comical that the Government House Leader got up and said, “Well, the normal process that we go through,” and then he went on to talk about that. The normal process for opposition and private members’ bills is that they’re allowed to have unanimous consent to take a leave of absence to table those. This government in its arrogance last Thursday wouldn’t allow it, yet Monday, when another unanimous consent needed to come forward, they were willing then.

They don’t have any respect for democracy, and they certainly have no respect for taxpayers’ money. They think they can buy votes. We listen to the Premier. She’s so excited. She’s proud: it’s going to do so well; the economy is just going to flourish; we can do that without the rest of the world, not even taking a moment to look at how fragile the world economy is right now. We’ve pushed it right to the edge in many, many areas. Even China and India, those great economic engines, at this time aren’t functioning, firing on all cylinders. [interjection] Oh, a government member says: yes, they are. They are not. And that’s

the problem of this government. Even when the engine is sputtering and failing to run, they just look at it like: hmm, well, we’re just taking a break.

It’s comical, Mr. Chairman. The problem is overspending of governments, and we’re not going to learn from that? This government is going to make this proposal, Bill 1, the Results-based Budgeting Act, like it’s going to do something.

If we go through the preamble, I want to skip down to: “Whereas engaging Albertans is vital to determine what results they want and to validate the results achieved.” I do not believe that Albertans want to run continuous deficit budgets. And what’s the Alison in wonderland, pie-in-the-sky answer? We’re going to have massive, massive surpluses within two years. Yet when you look, where is that going to come from? Personal and corporate and resource revenue. It’s unfathomable that we can be there. There is always a chance – never say never – but that doesn’t mean spend like there’s no tomorrow or it’s coming in. Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched. Don’t count your revenue before it’s in the bank. But this government is failing to do that, Mr. Chair.

Bill 1 is just a poor, poor excuse for a protest of a fiscally irresponsible government to say that we are going to focus on results-based budgeting going forward. Well, what have they been doing for the last four months when they prepared this budget? No results-based. What have they been doing for the last four years for the four previous deficit budgets? Were those results-based? What were they basing their decisions on? Certainly not results based, and they won’t go forward on that. What they’re basing their decisions on is that we are going to have another rainbow, and a pot of gold is going to be there. We’ll go and we’ll snap it up next year, and there will be five pots of gold the year after that. “All is well. Trust us. We’re spending your money well. No problems. Let’s just keep spending. Let’s just keep doing it.”

Results-based budgeting. Again, a switch there. What they really wanted to start off saying was zero-based budgeting, but then they thought: oh, no; that’s too much work. Zero-based budgeting means that we have to justify everything. Results-based means that we just need to say that the results are good. Zero-based budgeting would ask: “Do we go on a \$100,000 cabinet tour to actually ask about a budget that’s already written? Do we take a \$70,000 holiday to Jasper?” That isn’t results-based or zero-based budgeting.

This is a government that has no concept of having to try and hold money, grasp and hang onto that money. The worst of their results-based financing was the offence shortly after March of ’08. This government, including this Premier, gave themselves a 35 per cent pay hike, and then they want to turn around and tell all of our wonderful public servants and front-line workers: you guys don’t need it, but we do. That’s the worst and most offensive form of leadership that you can have, for the leader to say: “We deserve our feather-tick bed, but you will sleep on stones. That’s just the way it is.”

Their leadership has failed Albertans. They continue to live an opulent lifestyle, saying, “You know, we need all of these things,” but they want to turn around and say, “You guys need to stay at 3 per cent or 5 per cent; we can do 35 per cent.” Leadership is to freeze their wages first and then to turn around and talk to Albertans, teachers and nurses and doctors, and say that maybe they should even cut their wages. Well, they did, 35 per cent ahead, 10 per cent back, or some magical formula. You know, 15 steps forward, we’ll take one back, and they think: oh, isn’t that wonderful leadership. It’s not good enough, Mr. Chair. The results of their actions have been every other public worker saying: if you get that, well, then we should get more. It’s wrong.

What you need to do is have the results from action. Action speaks louder than words. It's time this government reined in their spending, prioritized their spending, and realized that it isn't sustainable. They have sucked the sustainability fund from \$17 billion down to \$4 billion. After next year I would project that it will be gone. Then how do we sustain the spending? Total misuse of the sustainability fund. One year: we can see that. We had some revenue shortfall, fine. Four years and five years in a row to take out massive amounts, up to \$6 billion in a year: there's something wrong with the budgeting process of this government and these members.

They're spendaholics. They're addicted. They're addicted to spending. They're addicted to power. The only thing they can do – and, again, I think of a family intervention when it comes to addictions. You've got to surround them and pull them down. This government and their addictions, they need a time out. I suspect that shortly Albertans are going to give many of them a time out when they go to the people of Alberta and say: "Trust us. We know how to spend your money better than you do. Trust us. We have a revenue problem. It's not a spending problem. We'll discuss that after we're re-elected and there's nothing that you can do about this."

This is the situation we're in. This is what Bill 1 is supposed to be about. It's about deception of the people of Alberta, saying that next year we're all of a sudden going to put a magnifying glass and find ways of making cuts when they've had that magnifying glass all along. For the last five years they've had it.

5:40

Mr. Chair, it is wrong. I'm against this Bill 1. It's the most ridiculous bill this government has brought forward. Last year Bill 1 was the Asia Advisory Council Act. That was ridiculous. The one before that was quite ridiculous. It said: "Oh, since we're not competitive here in Alberta because of what this government did, we'll pass a competitiveness act. That will tell the world that we're competitive again and open for business." They had to change the royalties. They had to change their structure in order to bring business back into the province. They need to change it again.

If we want the Alberta advantage, if we want businesses to come here, they need to be fiscally responsible. That doesn't mean building \$16 billion in power lines and then saying: now that we've pushed this through and we've achieved what we want, we can turn it back to the experts who said we didn't need it to look after the next 30 or 40 years. This is the equivalent of buying a 1982 Caravan and putting it in the garage for 30 years.

The Chair: The time has terminated.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on Bill 1. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the report, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 13: Mr. Campbell]

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege to rise today before the Assembly and reply to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. Before I begin mentioning my thoughts about the Speech from the Throne, I would like to recognize and give thanks to the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor for his dedicated and personal passion for our great province.

Mr. Speaker, I am especially pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents of Edmonton-Decore, whom I've had the honour and privilege to serve for four years. I'm very supportive of the directions in the Speech from the Throne, and I believe it offers a principled general framework for directions that we need to pursue on behalf of this province in the years to come in the interests of all Albertans. Throne speeches are by their nature quite general, but to me that presents each MLA with a real opportunity to suggest what some of the needed specifics might be from the perspective of elected representatives in this Assembly. In other words, what do we need to do in order to turn these solid general directions into effective actions that will help us in our efforts to put in place the kind of legislation and programs desired by the people we represent?

Mr. Speaker, like many members of this Assembly, I've been spending a great deal of time lately on the doorsteps of my constituents, and I can say with considerable confidence what it is that the residents of Edmonton-Decore want me to be pursuing on their behalf. The first thing to note is what they don't want. The residents of Edmonton-Decore don't want us to try to solve all of their problems for them or to provide programs and services that they can easily provide for themselves, nor do they want us to put unnecessary rules in place that would stand in the way of building opportunities that contribute to our economy and society as a whole.

Rather, when they send a representative to this Assembly, they would like their MLA to do something that is much less paternalistic and much more helpful. That is in essence to provide the necessary policies and programs to support the development of healthy and well-educated families and strong and safe communities.

Mr. Speaker, the people that I represent have education and health care at the top of their priorities. They believe and I believe that these two areas are absolutely central to the well-being of individuals, families, and communities and that this Legislature

has a crucial role in creating the conditions so that all of our families are healthy and well educated.

In addition, they believe and I believe that strong and safe communities are also vital to our individual and collective well-being and that they don't just happen. Their development, Mr. Speaker, is fostered by wise decisions by the people of this Assembly as well as representatives at the local level.

So what is it that we need to do in terms of more specific measures to make progress on this overall goal of supporting the development of healthy and well-educated families and safe and strong communities? One of the most helpful places to start is by recognizing that if we want strong schools, where the talent and potential of all of our children are fully developed, we must acknowledge that many of the reasons some children are not successful at learning have little to do with education and, instead, have much to do with noneducational factors such as hunger, poverty, and the lack of development in those crucial early years.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of needed action in this particular area it is essential to note that we're not trying to replace the work of families but, rather, to better support them so that children can succeed as learners. Further, that is going to require the provision of wraparound services for children at the school site, which will allow children's crucial and noneducational needs to be met so that teachers and support staff can concentrate on meeting their educational needs.

We need to work from the principle that strong schools and strong communities are intimately connected. If you want one, you have to work on the other as well. Mr. Speaker, that involves both newer and older communities and the role of school boards in both because our children live in both settings. I support the efforts to revitalize older communities because we need strong schools in strong communities. I'm very delighted to see recent efforts by our communities, school boards, and city council to work together in this regard in Edmonton. I believe this Legislature needs to support those efforts in effective ways.

Also, I believe that it is essential to better support families with young children in those crucial early years so that every child comes to school ready to learn. There are important collaborations going on between educators in Finland and Alberta in this regard, supported by this government, and we can learn much from Finland about how to support families in early learning through better diagnostic efforts and targeted supports to deal with problems that are identified in the early years. Mr. Speaker, if we can effectively support early learning in these ways, the payoffs down the line will be enormous for individuals, families, and our whole society.

Another thing that we need to work on if we are serious about healthy and well-educated families in strong and safe communities is the area of poverty reduction in our province. A comprehensive approach to poverty reduction, which is being pursued in six other provinces, not only strengthens our families and communities but has the potential to reduce crime and other social problems and, in the long run, to save money that is inevitably spent to deal with the consequences that play out in our communities across the province. Mr. Speaker, I promoted last year in this Assembly the idea of a comprehensive, preventative poverty reduction strategy for our province, and I am pleased that our Premier has indicated that she sees merit in this approach as well.

If we are serious about better supporting our families and communities, Mr. Speaker, we also need to look more closely at the situation of our seniors, particularly those with health that has declined. I'm very supportive of our government's aging-in-place initiatives, and I encourage all of us to look more closely at the vital issue of long-term care. All of our seniors are entitled to a

situation of dignity and respect, but there are simply not enough long-term care placements available and, as a result, too many of these vulnerable people are in acute-care beds within our hospitals. This situation is not working for those individuals or for our health care system in general. We can do a better job in this particular area, and in working together with allied professionals, helpful solutions can be created and implemented.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, when we talk further of health and of well-educated families, there is another opportunity in front of us that stems from the link between health and learning. In recent years the Canadian Council on Learning has completed an excellent body of work making clear the important gains that can come from improvements in health literacy, real gains that can result in enormous savings in health care expenditures. For years I've been a strong advocate for the development of a comprehensive approach to health and learning in schools and school systems, and I encourage us to strengthen our directions in this vital area in the coming year. The Canadian Council on Learning this past year strongly advocated for the voluntary and co-operative effort of the provinces to work together to provide a pan-Canadian structure to improve learning outcomes in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I've been most impressed by our new Premier's willingness to take a leadership role in important questions beyond Alberta's borders. This wonderful province of ours is poised to take on a much larger role in such issues, and I believe our Premier should be the one to take on the task of leading the way in promoting these improvements in learning in the manner that the Canadian Council on Learning has urged. There is no province better placed to do so and no one more qualified than our Premier to launch this initiative.

This throne speech has set the right directions. I believe that if we pursue these types of initiatives on behalf of our constituents, we will need help to support stronger families and communities and will in the process build a foundation for a stronger, more competitive province in an increasingly competitive and globalized world. We will do so by focusing on our mandate and strengthening our foundation to support families and communities in wise ways.

Mr. Speaker, I have often said that the future of our province is unwritten, and I'm very proud to say that the people in our province together with this government are going to build the next Alberta by working through the challenges and confidently creating and capitalizing on an abundance of opportunities. It is truly an honour and privilege to join with Albertans to create the next chapters of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, does any other hon. member want to join in on the speech? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and pleasure to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I would like to thank His Honour for his service to the province and to our nation.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne should be a blueprint, and it should be like a road map into the future, the future this government is taking us to. After listening to the speech and reading it, I'm appalled that there's nothing really new in the Speech from the Throne. Sure, there's support for health care, postsecondary education, and the environment – that's a good step

in the right direction – but we should be doing more. Whatever it takes to keep our environment clean, we have to have clean water, clean air. We should be doing more to protect our environment. If we don't protect our environment, it will cost us dearly in the future. I know what it has done to my home province in India. The water people drink is contaminated. People are dying from cancer, and people are suffering from hepatitis. We should be more vigilant about our environment so that we can have clean air and clean water.

Mr. Speaker, we are blessed to be living in a country and a province that's probably the richest jurisdiction on this planet Earth. We are literally blessed to have natural resources such as coal and gas. We have strong agriculture. We have forestry. With a population of only 3 and a half million, I think, if you put the per capita numbers together, we'd still be the richest people on this Earth.

That brings me to mining the oil sands, Mr. Speaker, the second-largest reserve of oil on this Earth. The oil sands are not just becoming the bread and butter of this province; they have become the provider, the bread and butter, of the whole nation. I'm talking about the export of unpressed, unprocessed bitumen. Premier Stelmach compared this to the sale of the topsoil of the Earth, topsoil to be sold. He promised to process more bitumen in Alberta to keep all the good-paying jobs in the province and not to ship all the jobs with the unprocessed bitumen to the States or other jurisdictions.

Now we are talking about two pipelines, the Keystone XL and the pipeline going to the west coast. When we start sending unprocessed bitumen, Mr. Speaker, to China or India or Southeast Asia, then we will be shipping those good-paying jobs with that, too. Sure, we need those pipelines. Sure, we need to ship our oil and other products to the markets, but we should be processing more bitumen here and shipping the finished product. We will not only get a better price for our product, but we will keep all the pipeline jobs right here in Alberta.

There are a number of major upgrading plants which were approved. They were going to go up in the heartland area and were going to bring billions of dollars of investment, new investment, into the province. We should be looking at reviving all those major projects. Let us work to have all those jobs in Alberta. It will bring in more revenue in personal income taxes

and carbon taxes as well, Mr. Speaker, and it will help to balance our budget. Since we go through the cycles of prosperity, boom and bust in our economy, this will also help us to ride out recessions in better ways than now.

Mr. Speaker, we could have gotten away from the cycles of boom and bust had this government been saving enough from the nonrenewable resource revenues. Premier Lougheed had the foresight to set up the heritage trust fund in 1976, as we know. Had we been serious enough to build up the heritage trust fund, we could have had probably a hundred billion dollars by now in the trust fund. The income from that trust fund could have insulated some of the shock of revenue falls during the recession. Our heritage trust fund savings are almost the same as they were in 1986. Norway and Alaska set up their trust funds a lot later than us and, for example, Norway has over \$500 billion in their trust fund, and it's growing.

Mr. Speaker, we should be looking at saving more. We could save for future generations so they could enjoy the same if not better living standards than we enjoy today. They are the owners of the natural resources as well, our future generations.

Now, coming back to health care, Mr. Speaker, you know, I think we're in trouble on the health care front. Long lineups. We have been doing everything. We've been spending more per capita, but we still have issues with health care. We have long lineups in emergency departments, and we have long waiting lists for knee replacements. A constituent of mine called yesterday, and he's on kidney dialysis and has been waiting seven years. I mean, we're failing Albertans on health care. This government has been trying to fix health care.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I have to interrupt you. It's 6 o'clock. You can continue next time. You have probably about 7 minutes left.

I want to remind hon. members that the policy field committees will reconvene at 6:30 p.m. in committee rooms A and B for consideration of the main estimates of the Department of Justice and Attorney General and the Department of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations.

According to Standing Order 4(2) the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

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

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