



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, February 15, 2012

Issue 6

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature

Fifth Session

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	Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

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

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Evan Berger	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Political Minister for Southern Alberta
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Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

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Johnston
MacDonald
Quest
Taft

Standing Committee on Community Development

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

Chair: Ms Pastoor
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Bhardwaj
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Rodney
Rogers
Swann
Woo-Paw

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 15, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing two great Albertans to the House, Brigadier-General Andre and Mrs. Kaetlyn Corbould, two great Canadians that have contributed significantly to our province.

Since joining Edmonton's Military Family Resource Centre as a board member and later chair in 2003 and, subsequently, her membership in the Edmonton Salutes Committee, Mrs. Corbould's efforts on behalf of the capital region's military families have been outstanding. Working within the volunteer organizations, she has continually sought to develop ties to partner organizations within the province and to improve services to military families who have faced numerous challenges resulting from the heavy tempo of operations associated with Canada's international and domestic operations. I would like to inform the House that in recognition of her outstanding efforts, she was awarded the Chief of the Defence Staff's medallion of distinguished service, a rare honour that is given only to the most deserving for their contributions.

Her husband, Brigadier-General Andre Corbould, has an equally distinguished resumé of accomplishments. Whether commanding Edmonton's 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group, which provided security for the 2010 Winter Olympics, commanding troops in support of the Winnipeg floods, or directly supporting the dive effort following the Swissair tragedy on Canada's east coast, Brigadier-General Corbould has worked tirelessly in his efforts to make Canada a better and more secure country. Internationally his distinguished service has brought him to the Balkans, East Timor, and Afghanistan, from where he recently returned after a one-year tour of duty as Deputy Commanding General of the United States Army 10th Mountain Division. As the deputy commander of a 25,000-soldier division conducting operations throughout southern Afghanistan, he brought international recognition to Canada for his contribution to the international effort in that country.

They are seated in your gallery this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that they rise and that we give them the traditional warm welcome and thank you from Alberta. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and an honour to introduce to you and through you to this Legislative Assembly a group of very enthusiastic students from Dunluc

elementary school. They have been participating in a mock Legislature, and they passed a bill to make school uniforms mandatory. Half of them are happy with this, and half of them are not, so it's not much different than what happens in the real legislative sittings. They are accompanied today by Mr. Sam Kostiuk and also Madame Cynthia Pharis, who are their teachers. I would like them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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 your constituents from Neerlandia public Christian school, with 19 students and five adults here this afternoon: their teacher, Jim Bosma, and parent helpers Sharla Bakker, Helena Hamoen, Christien Hospers, and Gail Verheul. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville I would like to introduce to you and through you students from the Win Ferguson elementary school, the school that shines. These students have made the trip to Edmonton from Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta. I want to acknowledge the teachers and parents who made this trip happen: teachers Carla McTurk and Sheila Storey; and parents Jason Fournier, Lori Klebak, Jenny Croteau, Debbie Harrison, and Sandra Harrison. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure today for me to rise and introduce somebody that's been a friend for about 10 or 12 years now and in some ways a mentor, someone that's built a great reputation fighting for that powerful airport tunnel in northeast Calgary, Alderman Jim Stevenson.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you on behalf of the Minister of Human Services two guests from his constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud, Ken and Joan Digweed. This is Mr. and Mrs. Digweed's very first visit to the Legislature, and I'm very pleased to welcome them on behalf of my colleague. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two introductions. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my constituents William Rohats and his parents, JoAnne and Bob, as well as William's caregiver, Aibin George, who I first met at the International Day of Persons with Disabilities back in December. William is a very intelligent young man with a wonderful sense of humour, qualities that help him manage his Tourette's syndrome and cerebral palsy. He's always optimistic, always looking for solutions. He's also very interested in politics and feels that caregivers of people with disabilities deserve better pay. William and his family have asked me to pass on their sincere gratitude to the Premier for the raise in

AISH benefits, and I'm happy to do the same. Thank you, Premier. Hon. members, please join me in offering William and Aibin as well as William's parents the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, for my second introduction I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the newest member of the Alberta Liberal caucus staff, Amy McBain. Amy was born and raised in Edmonton and lives doors away from the hon. member from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. She's a graduate of the broadcast journalism program right here in Edmonton at NAIT. She will be working with our communications staff as our new media liaison person, and we are glad to have her join our team. Amy is seated in the public gallery. I'd ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and privilege today to introduce five people who are here to raise awareness about the failed mental health system in Alberta for them and their families. Cheryl Brown and Ryan Dean were victims of violence from a schizophrenic family member identified repeatedly as a threat without proper action being taken over a number of years. Mike Butler is an Edmonton citizen whose wife was murdered five years ago due to the failure of our mental health system both in managing and in referring his brother for proper treatment. Phill and Julia Murphy, whose daughter, a minor, struggles with addictions and mental illness, continue to be neglected by Health and Human Services. I'll ask them to stand and be recognized by the Legislature.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly the management team of one of my favourite organizations, the Oliver primary care network. I'll introduce each individual to you, and then I'll have them stand and receive the traditional greeting when we're all done. First, of course, is Colleen Enns, the executive director; Lee Hall; Kendall Olson; Charlotte Metcalf; Romel Jarrar; Jamil Ramji; Barb Moysey; Sharon Macklin; Lorie Radmanovich; and Jacquie Frend. I'll be doing a member's statement on them shortly. If they would all now please rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you Ed Shaske from Smoky Lake, one of my constituents. Ed was a former chief economist for the province of Alberta during some of the Lougheed era, and he's now a columnist with the *Smoky Lake Signal*. He's a pillar of that community, involved in many groups and in many functions around the town. It's a privilege to have him here today. I'd ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the House a

friend and councillor from the town of Peace River, Mr. North Darling. He was elected as a councillor, and now he's the deputy mayor. Of course, he's down for the AUMA board meeting. Mr. Darling is actually new to politics, but I'm pretty confident that his background in the private sector as a carpenter and working in the oil and gas industry and, probably most importantly, as an improvisational comedian has prepared him well for politics. I'd ask North to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: There's one I'd like to acknowledge and introduce today, and that's the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and Minister of Seniors, who is celebrating the anniversary of his arrival in the world today.

Members' Statements

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

Leduc No. 1 Oil Discovery

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to celebrate a discovery that made history, Leduc No. 1. On February 13 65 years ago in a field some three miles south of where the town of Devon is located today, Vern Hunter, or Dry Hole as he had become known, and his crew brought in the well that heralded the prosperity we have enjoyed in this province.

Mr. Speaker, Imperial Oil had drilled some 133 dry wells and was on the verge of giving up its search in the area. Leduc No. 1 was the catalyst that saw tremendous growth in central Alberta and, indeed, all of Alberta. Our province now boasts the third-largest proven oil reserves in the world. The growth of the city of Leduc can be directly attributed to this discovery, and the town of Devon was planned, designed, and built by Imperial Oil to house the workforce needed to develop the neighbouring field.

This discovery spawned a very successful production and service sector with tremendous expertise that continues to drive the economy of our great province. The Nisku industrial park, located within 15 kilometres of the site, employs some 20,000 people and is second only in scale to another such energy business centre in the state of Texas, Mr. Speaker. The site has been developed and preserved to educate today's and future generations about the significance of this discovery.

I commend all the volunteers and the neighbouring communities of Leduc county, the city of Leduc, and the town of Devon for their tireless efforts in preserving the site and for planning the anniversary celebrations to take place the weekend of August 18 and 19 of this year. I invite all my colleagues and all Albertans to visit this national treasure and join us for the celebration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Municipal Funding

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, on Monday Wildrose leader Danielle Smith released our 10-10 municipal funding plan. Under the plan 10 per cent of tax revenues and 10 per cent of budget surpluses will flow through directly to municipalities with no strings attached: no complicated grant applications, no crossing your fingers and hoping for approvals, no waiting on pins and needles for badly needed dollars, just steady and predictable funding.

The point is to take politics out of municipal funding. Linda Sloan, president of the AUMA, made that point last week when she responded to the provincial budget. She said what opposition parties and municipal politicians across Alberta have been saying

for years, that municipal dollars are handed down based on politics, not always on need. Sloan has since incurred the full wrath of this petty and vindictive government.

The Municipal Affairs minister staged a government-wide AUMA boycott, and the Premier's chief of staff publicly called her a malicious liar, this on the same day the government tabled antibullying legislation.

Danielle Smith talks about a new deal for municipalities, and this whole shameful episode shows exactly why we need one. Municipalities have had enough of this government's economic bullying and of having their funding depend on their level of support for the PC Party. It's time for a provincial government that respects municipalities as a legitimate order of government and empowers them to meet the needs and priorities they set for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, municipal politicians are just like each and every one of us in this Assembly. They serve to make their communities the best they can be. They don't need nor do they deserve a provincial government that looms large over their heads threatening to drop the hammer if they don't quite fall in line. Public criticism makes good organizations stronger and bad organizations fail sooner. After this ordeal I'm confident that the provincial government will prove to be the latter.

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

Oliver Primary Care Network

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my last member's statement I made reference to a new clinic that is currently short not of doctors but of patients. The organization behind this, who I introduced earlier, is the Oliver primary care network. This PCN serves well over a hundred thousand Edmontonians and had 171,000 patient interactions last year. This is certainly a statistically valid sampling, and it shows some remarkable results. Of the 171,000 interactions 87 per cent of those people saw a doctor as soon as necessary and, even more impressive, 94 per cent of them saw their own doctor.

Equally interesting, Mr. Speaker, is the ability of patients to feel confident in their ability to manage their own conditions. Persons receiving care in many areas, including mental health, dietitians, chronic disease management, INR, and kinesiology, show that well over 70 per cent of them believe that they had learned enough from PCN staff to manage their own condition. Overall, in each of the five programs self-rating of good, very good, and excellent account for 75 to 95 per cent of patient responses.

My favourite metric, Mr. Speaker, and the one I think best describes this PCN's goal is the reduction in medication error when transitioning from hospital to home. A PCN pharmacist is available to ensure that the patients take the right medication at the right time. This arrangement proves that the PCN model is the right way to deliver services, and I'm going to give them a slogan: We Know Who You Are, and We Know What You Need. While it's not It's All in Calder, it certainly tells people why it's all in Calder.

Many people who reside in my constituency are older and typically not in as good of health as the average population, making my constituency a prime place for the delivery of this health care model.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Colleen and her associates today for the exceptional level of service they bring to my constituency and elsewhere.

Thank you.

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

National Flag of Canada Day

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise to speak in celebration of National Flag of Canada Day. While Canadians first celebrated this occasion in 1996, it commemorates an important event that occurred on February 15, 1965. At noon on that day our Canadian flag was raised over Parliament Hill for the first time.

During the inauguration ceremony the hon. Maurice Bourget, Speaker of the Senate at that time, spoke about its significance. He said, "The flag is the symbol of the nation's unity, for it, beyond any doubt, represents all the citizens of Canada without distinction of race, language, belief or opinion."

Back in 1965 the red maple leaf embodied our nation's hopes and dreams for the future. After almost 50 years of representing Canada, I believe that the flag has taken on new meanings. Mr. Speaker, people around the world now recognize the Canadian flag as a symbol of democracy, of prosperity, and of freedom. For Canadians our flag has become a source of great pride. We are proud to live in a country where our rights and freedoms are protected. We are also proud to raise our children in a place where they have access to excellent public education, health care, and many other services that few in the world are so privileged to receive.

Mr. Speaker, I feel very fortunate to live in this great country and to be represented by the Canadian flag. I would ask every fellow citizen to take a moment today, National Flag of Canada Day, to reflect on what our red and white maple leaf flag means to you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Government Relationship with the AUMA

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the throne speech it's written: "A terrific quality of life requires the province to work closely with all municipalities." It was very disturbing, therefore, to read the Minister of Municipal Affairs' letter to the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association president, Linda Sloan. In the letter he berated her for criticizing the budget and announced that government caucus will boycott the AUMA breakfast tomorrow morning as punishment. This is a democratic province. To the Premier: who made the reckless and irresponsible decision that the entire government caucus will boycott the AUMA breakfast?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have a great deal of respect for the work that the AUMA does, and some of the comments that have been made in the last week have been terribly unfortunate. One of the things that's been very important this week is to determine, of the comments that were made, whether they were made on a personal basis or on behalf of the organization. My understanding is that the minister has been working very closely with the organization to resolve those issues, and we'll ensure that we continue to work very closely with local municipalities because that is what will build the province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our municipal leaders: that's where the rubber hits the road. They are the representatives of the same voters who vote for us. Given that just three years ago the chief of staff was forced out of the Wildrose Party after he crudely mocked the former Premier's Ukrainian accent and then just yesterday he defamed the president of the AUMA – quote, let's be clear: Linda Sloan didn't just criticize the budget; she lied maliciously, unquote – will the Premier show leadership and take personal responsibility and apologize to Albertans on behalf of the government and immediately fire her chief of staff?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I was made aware of these comments about an hour ago. I have said publicly that I do not condone the comments, and I have already directed my chief of staff to apologize directly for them.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has gone out of its way to avoid giving answers on this issue, I would like to ask the Premier a very direct question. Due to the disrespect shown by the minister, will the Premier ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs to apologize immediately to Albertans or demand his resignation?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the job of the Minister of Municipal Affairs is to ensure that we are delivering services to Alberta's municipalities by working in partnership with municipal governments. Everything that I've seen the minister do in the last week has ensured that we have a relationship with AUMA that will allow that to continue. I firmly stand behind the minister's comments and will do no such thing.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everything I've seen recently was what we would normally call schoolyard bullying.

Electricity Prices

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Premier why this government doesn't just make the fixed term contract the default option instead of telling Albertans to make a dozen phone calls to find a rate that won't break their bank account. She chose not to rise and answer yesterday. Perhaps today will be different. To the Premier: why doesn't the government show some practical leadership and make the fixed-term contract the default option to help working families?

Ms Redford: I don't know what the hon. member is talking about. I distinctly remember him asking this question yesterday, and I distinctly remember rising and answering it, and not for the first time, Mr. Speaker. What we know is that while there are a number of companies that provide options, the customers only have to make one call, and that's to the Utilities Consumer Advocate, to get the information that they need. If they do choose to sign a contract, we know that it will reduce their costs by 42 per cent today.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier was actually listening and if she actually cared, she would know exactly what I'm talking about.

Given that yesterday my question for the government to get involved in fixing the price gouging happening under this failed policy of deregulation was dismissed by the Premier as dangerous

words, I'd like to ask the Premier: who would these words be dangerous to? Albertans, who finally get some much-needed relief from sky-high electricity bills, or their government's corporate buddies?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, dangerous words were government involvement. Dangerous words were presuming that the solution to this is for government to fix the problem. What we know is that in other jurisdictions where this has happened, what that has meant is that they have taken on debt with respect to the cost of electricity, and we're not going to do that in this province.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, what's dangerous is that this is the same government that caused the problem. You caused the problem.

Given that this government has gone out of its way to avoid giving direct answers and gone out of its way to hurt hard-working families, will this government do anything at all – anything – to give Albertans relief on sky-high energy bills, Premier? Can you answer that question?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd like the Leader of the Opposition to listen carefully. Since deregulation the private sector at private risk has added 6,600 new megawatts of power to the Alberta electricity grid, entirely at the risk of private investors. There is no public debt in this province, unlike Ontario and Quebec, with \$20 billion, \$30 billion, \$60 billion that the consumers have to pay twice for.

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

Mental Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mental illness services continue to fail Albertans and their families, both in hospitals and in the communities. Alberta has 50 per cent of the national average in psychiatric beds, and this government is in denial. Hard-working mental health staff themselves are distressed as they see too many Band-Aids, resulting in revolving doors for our most desperate citizens and their families, with violence – preventable violence – the result. To the Premier: with wait times for psychiatric and outpatient assessment in Calgary alone at four to six months and overcrowding of our emergency rooms and psychiatric beds, when will this government stop denying and make mental health a priority?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this government believes that mental health is a priority. As Minister of Justice I've stood in this House for three years and said that we needed to deal with mental health. And we need to deal with it comprehensively. We need to deal with it in the community, we have to deal with it through institutions, and we have to deal with it within families. As you may well know, in this budget introduced in this House last Thursday, this government and our minister of health have suggested a significant increase with respect to funding on mental health, and I'll look forward to that debate during that period.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, standing up and speaking about mental health does not improve front-line services.

Primary care networks are the first line in prevention, early intervention, and maintenance care for people with mental illness. Why this year, then, is there no strengthening of primary care networks?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have introduced this year alone

projects that will introduce family care clinics in locations across this province for the exact reason of ensuring that there is a comprehensive approach to family health care, to primary care, and to mental health. I will tell you that Albertans know that, and I will not in this House be lectured to by this hon. member as to what he thinks might be best in his mind with respect to mental health.

Dr. Swann: So we're going to try some pilot projects instead of strengthening the system that you've established. Those primary care networks are the fundamental way of getting people out of emergency departments. Three people in this gallery experienced violence, including death of a family member, due to failure of this mental health system. When will we see timely and effective care for people with mental illness in this province?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, one thing that I know that has happened when we deal with safe communities agendas, with primary health care, and with mental health is that there are sometimes some really sad tragedies. I will tell you that it is the commitment of this government to ensure that we avoid those at all costs, but I will also tell you that this government will not make political hay out of those tragedies.

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

2:00 Government Relationship with the AUMA
(continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By sending a combative and intimidating letter to the AUMA, this government sent a chilling message to municipal officials across this province: if you're not with us, then you're against us. Not only is this completely inappropriate behaviour; it is wrong, and it's unethical. But the Premier's chief of staff decided to take it a step further by calling the president of the AUMA a malicious liar. Can the Premier then tell Albertans if she stands behind her chief of staff's petty comments and whether or not she believes the AUMA are malicious liars? And, please, Premier, don't tell Albertans that you just heard about it an hour ago.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see that the hon. member listened to part of the answer. I was very clear. I said that an hour ago I publicly said that I did not condone this language and that I've directed my chief of staff to apologize.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Premier. Given that the primary role of the chief of staff is to help implement the Premier's agenda for the government, can this Premier tell us if she agrees with most Albertans that her chief of staff was completely out of line?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, asked and answered.

Mrs. Forsyth: Given that this government, Mr. Speaker, has gotten quite the reputation for its intimidation tactics and bullying of not only our elected officials but of health professionals as well, can you, Premier, then tell Albertans when this bullying is going to stop?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure what she's speaking to in particular. What we know is that this minister has asked the Health Quality Council to undergo some very significant work with respect to what's going on in the health care system, and I'm looking forward to the results of that report.

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

Emergency Health Services

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has consistently failed to provide timely access to emergency care for Albertans. Once again the latest report from the AHS has shown that patients are spending hours and hours in waiting rooms because of this government's incompetence. Albertans are suffering while the government does nothing. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier admit that her government is unable to run the health care system and apologize to Albertans?

Ms Redford: What we know is that there are a number of factors that go into making a health care system effective, and there is no doubt that two of those are metrics and statistics. You will know, Mr. Speaker, that I'm committed to ensuring that we have positive outcomes in the health care system. One of the things that we're going to have to take a look at is not only where we are with respect to those commitments but also what the statistics have been going in. I understand from my minister of health that, unfortunately, we've seen a 17 per cent increase in the use of emergency rooms. That is unfortunate. It speaks to something else, which is that we need to make sure that support is being given where it needs to be given. I know the minister of health is working in a very transparent way with emergency doctors to resolve the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government tries over and over to fix it. They set targets, and then they don't meet them, and then they set new targets. Given that the East Edmonton health centre was planned to include an urgent care centre that would have diverted 30,000 cases from the Royal Alex ER every year and given that the government has refused to fund the centre, what answers can this Premier give to those Edmontonians who are unnecessarily waiting for hours and hours in the Royal Alexandra emergency room?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, to pick up where the hon. Premier just left off, in addition to the increase of 17 per cent in emergency department visits the government has also been working very hard with physicians over the last year to open up additional primary care networks, the three new family care clinics that the Premier referred to and well over a thousand continuing care spaces each year, moving us toward our goal of 5,300 over five years, and on a number of other initiatives that give Albertans an alternative to emergency departments when it's appropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government has consistently failed to keep its promises to reduce waiting times in emergency rooms, and Albertans are tired of waiting for hours or even days in hallways. Why will this minister and this Premier continue to give hollow promises to Albertans instead of admitting that they're incapable of fixing the system?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member conveniently ignores the work of literally hundreds of physicians and nurses and other health professionals over the last year to make significant improvements to our system. While it is true that in the case of these particular indicators we may not meet the targets that were

proposed for the end of March, we have made very significant progress in other areas. The most important indicator to this government is providing the right care by the right provider at the right time to each and every Albertan. Primary health care is what's going get us there.

Government Relationship with the AUMA (continued)

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, you asked me some time ago, at the inauguration reception for the Premier, why I was planning on getting out of politics. I can't think of a better example of why I want out than the government's unanimous hissy fit yesterday with the AUMA. To the Premier. I don't care who started it; I don't care who said what. You are our Premier, and the people you serve expect you to be bigger than this. What are you going to do to make this right?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we're going to do exactly what we said we would do, which is have a partnership with municipalities that is constructive for all Albertans. One of the ways that we can do that is to ensure that we have clear communication between the AUMA and the government. There is no reason to presume that simply because comments were made, we should accept the fact that they were made. If we believe that there were comments made that were not something that we agree with, I think it's entirely within the rights of this minister to correct that information and to clarify the communication between the two organizations. I think they're making very good progress on that.

Mr. Taylor: Again to the Premier. I'm just curious here. Since local governments are pretty much at the whim of this government, which doles out their allowances, how is yesterday's behaviour supposed to give them any confidence that the minister won't just pull all their MSI funding the next time he feels insulted by something one of them said?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I need to make something very clear. I have always accepted criticism, new ideas, and discussion. That's part of democracy. But when we get to a point where slanderous comments are made, I don't think we should tolerate it simply because we're politicians. It demeans everyone in the political process to allow slanderous comments to be made. Now, in speaking to Ms Sloan, she made it very clear that those slanderous comments were not made by her. I take her at her word, and we'll be at the breakfast tomorrow.

Mr. Taylor: Again to the Premier: while I believe municipalities should be an equal order of government, given this government's insistence on retaining the paternal model, will the Premier at least promise to be the adult in the relationship from here on in and to ensure that her minister behaves like one, too?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I've been working on building better communities in this province for 10 years. I made it very clear with the AAMD and C and the AUMA when I met with them many times over the last four months that I want to work towards a new funding arrangement with MSI and to an enhanced MGA that's empowering to municipalities so they can provide the right services. None of that has changed. We're going to continue to work as partners to build better communities because that's our number one job.

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

Primary Care Networks

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I indicated in my member's statement that a new clinic has opened in my constituency that is in need of about 2,000 patients.

An Hon. Member: What constituency?

Mr. Elniski: Edmonton-Calder, hon. member.

This clinic, as part of the Oliver primary care network, is solving access issues in my neighbourhood. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given ongoing discussions about improving access to primary care services, how is it possible for a PCN to have a need for patients?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer is very simple. The people of Alberta have a need for PCNs. The hon. member is quite correct in indicating that this new capacity in his constituency is going to add greatly to the services available in that community. The PCNs determine by a process of a business plan what programs and services they are going to offer in each of their respective member clinics. This particular PCN has a budget of approximately \$3.5 million per year. They serve over 110,000 patients. I have every confidence that your constituents' needs will be well met.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the Minister of Health and Wellness: are primary care networks helping to improve access for other Albertans in the province?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as has been pointed out by members on all sides of the House, primary care networks have done a great deal to improve access to the care that Albertans depend on every day. There are currently over 40 PCNs operating across the province. They involve approximately 2,400 family physicians and serve more than 2.8 million Albertans. Services such as mental health, rehabilitation, addictions, and other related services are available to Albertans through their local PCNs. We're working to support them, and that's part of the discussions with the AMA at this point in time.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Are primary care networks giving Albertans better access to family doctors?

2:10

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question. The answer to the question is yes, not only because of the great involvement of family physicians in our primary care networks but specifically because of the involvement of other health professionals that work alongside our physicians each and every day. The involvement of dietitians, nurse practitioners, physiotherapists, pharmacists, and others leaves physicians freer to see a greater number of patients, particularly those with more complex needs, who need to see a doctor more frequently.

Thank you.

School Fees

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, picture this. It is the first day of school; a young immigrant family brings their six-year-old to school. Can you imagine their excitement as well as their fear and anxiety?

Adding to all of this, on the first day the principal notifies them that they will need to pay hundreds of dollars for the child to attend the school. To the Minister of Education: will you provide the necessary funding so that schools don't have to rely on school fees for busing and basic instruction?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current funding model, which is per child funding with additional funding envelopes for special needs, is adequate, I would argue, in many cases more than adequate, to deliver the Alberta curriculum. Now, when parents choose to deliver children to schools of choice which are outside of their catchment area or where school boards and locally elected trustees choose to deliver additional enrichment programming, there may be fees attached to that. But basic Alberta education, which is not so basic, I might add, is fully covered by the funding that is provided to schools.

Mr. Hehr: The minister should talk to principals and teachers, who would disagree with that assertion. By not fully funding our education system, schools have to rely on fees to provide basic busing and instructional materials for kids. It's just a tax by another name. Will this minister eliminate this unfair tax?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, if this member chooses to refer to it as tax, then he may, but that would mean that this is a tax levied by local school boards and locally elected trustees, not the government of Alberta.

However, it has come to my attention that there is a great deal of disparity in school fees being charged by a variety of school boards. I have full intention to look at the structure of school fees that school boards are charging and see what it is and what should and should not be allowable.

Mr. Hehr: I'd ask the minister: instead of propping up private schools, why not just commit these dollars to public education to eliminate school fees?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, for the first time in the history of this province this government has committed to a three-year funding model, elevating it from \$6.8 billion to \$7.1 billion over the next three years. We're spending \$23 million per day on education. Funding levels are not the issue. But we do have to take a look at what fees are being charged to make sure that basic Alberta education, which is world renowned, is delivered free of charge to our students because there's no need for additional fees for that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Social Housing for Seniors

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first two questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Seniors in Alberta who live in government-owned housing deserve a quality place to call home. With many social housing units more than 30 years old what are you doing to update them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely right. We have through the Alberta Social Housing Corporation ownership of about 26,000 housing units, which incorporate 14,000 seniors' self-contained units and almost 4,000

lodge spaces, and there are another 6,000 lodge spaces owned by municipalities. We have a plan going forward for the next five years to utilize the \$260 million in the Alberta Social Housing Corporation to rejuvenate those housing units because we know how critical that housing is going to be to Alberta seniors going forward.

Mrs. Leskiw: That's good news, and it was a pleasure to be part of the announcement earlier today in Bonnyville, especially considering that among other upgrades there will be an additional 52 units added to Villa Ouimet and Bonnylodge.

To the same minister. It's clear that partnerships are key. What's the role of housing authorities in updating government-owned housing stock?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe and this government believes that solutions are usually found at the community level. It's incredibly important, regardless of us having a general provincial strategy to rejuvenate those properties, to make sure we work hand in hand with the municipalities, the municipal housing associations, to make sure that we build housing that's appropriate for the needs of those seniors in those communities. I can't emphasize enough how important those partnerships are and that co-operation is. The initiative has to come from the local level.

Mrs. Leskiw: My last question is to the Minister of Seniors. Thank you, Minister, for travelling up this morning for the announcement. What does an announcement like this mean to seniors that live in lodges across the province?

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you for that question, and thank you for the congratulations on my birthday, Mr. Speaker, but a more important birthday was this morning in Bonnyville. A lady named Anna turned 103. She lives in the Bonny Lodge. This is about Anna and all of the people that live in that area to have quality services for years to come. The Bonny Lodge was built in 1960 and served that community very well. This new lodge will serve that community for decades and decades, and I'm so proud to have been part of that opening this morning.

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

Revenue from VLTs and Slot Machines

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Yesterday the Deputy Premier suggested that my statistics on problem gambling were inaccurate. Unfortunately, they are not. Today I have more questions for this government regarding VLT and slot machine revenue. To the Deputy Premier: what per cent of the money inserted into a VLT or slot machine is retained as profit by this government?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, off the top of my head I'm not recalling the exact split. I know there is a formula there on the VLTs as a percentage split, and I'm sure the hon. member has that.

I also wanted to comment that yesterday the hon. member brought up the number of 72 per cent from one study out of a number of studies that have been done. It's interesting to note that he should have also brought up the fact that Alberta is a recognized leader in the research on problem gambling and, in fact, invests more than most jurisdictions in North America.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: why does the government advertise – and they advertise right here, sir – that the

average take for VLTs is 8 per cent when in reality this government is raking in close to a 30 per cent profit on an annual basis from VLTs?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the government of Alberta is recognized as a leader in the charitable gaming model. There are a number of jurisdictions around the world that have come to Alberta to look at our model and, in fact, are looking at copying the model because it goes back to communities. The dollars are invested where the dollars are created, and I think that's a very admirable way for us to do the charitable gaming model.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: who secretly ordered the accounting changes to hide the true amounts collected in government profits from VLTs and slot machines? Was it this government, was it the AGLC, or was it the office of the Auditor General? Who did that?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with any secretive changes, and I'm certain that the hon. member, who I believe has had a great deal to do with the Public Accounts Committee in this Assembly – and I would caution him to be careful about suggesting that the Auditor General is making secretive changes to accounting practices. I think that's crossing a bit of a line there.

The Speaker: I agree. There is extreme caution with respect to statements like that.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Education Legislation

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall the Minister of Education decided to delay Bill 18, stating that even after significant discussions by the previous minister, more consultation was required. I'd like to know what value this eight-week exercise added to the drafting of the new education legislation. My question is to the Minister of Education. Perhaps Albertans had reached consultation fatigue on the education legislation. Did anyone new actually participate in this eight-week session?

The Speaker: My understanding is that in a matter of minutes from now there will be the moving of second reading of the Education Act, so I think we may be able to avoid questioning on that until we get into the actual second reading.

Mr. Lukaszuk: It is an intriguing question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: It is an intriguing question. That's not the point.

Does your next question have to do with the Education Act, which will go to second reading shortly?

Mrs. Jablonski: Yes, it does, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, let's just wait until then, okay?

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

2:20

Provincial Tax Policy

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both the budget and throne speeches clearly state that this government, if re-elected, intends to review taxation after the election. This is unacceptable. Elections are about telling voters where party leaders and candidates stand on different issues, and then letting people decide

which direction they wish to go. The Wildrose leader and MLAs will be signing a pledge that promises Albertans the only way taxes are going under a Wildrose government is down. To the President of the Treasury Board: will you sign this pledge on behalf of your government and your constituents? Sign the pledge.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the last thing that I will ever do, living in the province of Alberta, is join or sign a pledge by the Wildrose Alliance Party of the province of Alberta.

The hon. member does not read very well, I guess, because in our documents it does not say that we're going to review taxation. We're going to review the fiscal framework of this province, which includes, among other things, Mr. Speaker, all parts of our spending. It includes the programs that we're dealing with. It includes the pieces of savings that we're going to be moving forward with in what we're doing to build a province that will have 10 million people.

Mr. Anderson: Let's try this again. To the Municipal Affairs minister – and I hope I can still have breakfast with you after I ask you this question – given our province already takes in more revenue and spends more than any other province, including our tax-and-spend Liberal friends in Ontario and Quebec, and given the current budget predicts Alberta will be swimming in cash within two years and given you are a self-professed fiscal conservative from the rural heartland of Alberta, surely you are willing to sign the pledge to not increase taxes, aren't you? Sign the pledge.

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, we need to make the appropriate decisions on what's best for Albertans. I remember at AAMD and C you could have heard a pin drop in the room when that party's leader pledged to drop infrastructure spending to \$4 billion. Everyone started to discuss where their schools, their hospitals, their roads, their water and infrastructure were going to come from. I'd like to see him sign that pledge and promise Albertans he'll do less.

Mr. Anderson: A key step in any addiction recovery program, including spending addiction, shopping addiction, is to take a pledge. One last time to the minister that oversees the oil and gas that this government says is going to have us popping champagne and cranking up the government cheque-writing machine for the next several years. Given that in a former life this Energy minister was a steadfast proponent of limited government and recoiled at the very thought of tax increases, surely you of anyone over there, Minister, will sign the pledge not to increase or create new taxes. Give Alberta taxpayers a lifeline, sir. I'm begging you. Please sign the pledge.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'll be very happy to sign a pledge that ensures that the schools that are needed in Airdrie and Chestermere will be built, built by this government and not by that government.

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

School Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years if not decades this government has outright neglected to ensure schools remain in safe, workable, and, most importantly, teachable condition. This has repeatedly been brought to the government's attention, most recently by the Holy Cross school division. To the Minister of

Infrastructure: given that this problem has built up over the last 20 years by this government's mismanagement, is this government just playing the role of the ostrich, burying its head in the sand and choosing to ignore this problem?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, perhaps a word of explanation or sharing of information is required because I heard that member asking questions yesterday. The member should be aware of the fact that schools are built by Alberta Education, but the moment the building is actually built and ready for occupancy by students, we hand over the keys to a school board, and then this school board operates and maintains the building and makes sure that the building is in a workable state. So any issues relevant to the condition of a building as it is being maintained by the school board are to be addressed with the trustees of that local jurisdiction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. School boards across Alberta have estimated deferred maintenance bills on Alberta's crumbling schools to be \$2.3 billion. When are these schools going to be in a teachable condition, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, we have allocated dollars not only for maintaining current buildings but also for building additional buildings. The facts are simple. We are facing an unprecedented growth of population in enrolment in kindergarten and grade 1. The province attracted last year 128,000 new Albertans, mostly young Albertans that are having young families over here. The answer is: we definitely need to focus on building more schools to accommodate this growth, and we will be working with school boards relevant to maintaining their current schools in a shape that is respectable and adequate for the children in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the new Minister of Infrastructure blamed the school boards for, in his own words, the maintenance problems. Is the minister seriously sticking to his story?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, what I said yesterday is that this government flows about a hundred million dollars a year to school boards specifically for maintenance of the schools. Those school divisions have maintenance plans that they implement, and they have the ability to decide priorities within their school boards. That's what I said, and we stick by that. Obviously, we'd love to flow more money to those school boards if possible, but it's a balancing act, and we're trying to do the best we can for Albertans.

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

South Calgary Health Campus

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently in census data, as we heard earlier, there have been a lot of people moving to the province, a lot of them young. Calgary is a very, very young city. In that same article they talked about the aging baby boomers, and the answer was to have babies. Well, the south of Calgary has answered that call. They're having babies. We have a baby boom happening. My questions are to the minister of health. We're

looking at that new hospital. We want to have our babies there. When can we expect to be able to deliver the babies of south Calgary at the new hospital?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say with confidence that there will be many, many babies born at the south Calgary campus when it opens later this year. The hospital is opening in phases. Because of its size the first phase will open this summer, and that will see the family outpatient clinics open to patients. That will be followed by the opening of the emergency department in the fall.

Mrs. Ady: That's good news, Mr. Speaker. But they're also asking me – the concern is: are there enough doctors, are there enough nurses to open a brand new hospital? Can you assure us that Alberta Health Services has that plan under hand and that they'll be there?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Since my appointment as minister I have asked a number of questions about staffing plans for the south Calgary campus. I can tell the House that when the first phase opens this summer, there will be approximately 780 staff, including physicians and nurses. By late 2013, when all services are fully operational, Alberta Health Services will have approximately 2,400 full-time staff, including 180 physicians, at the south health campus.

Mrs. Ady: My last supplemental would go to the Minister of Infrastructure. During the recession we had a hard time keeping projects on cost. Was this project able to come in on budget on time, and when are you going to give the keys to the minister of health?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell you is that the budget changed on this project over the years, and at its peak it was about \$1.4 billion. I'm happy to report that we expect the project to come in slightly under the \$1.3 billion mark. The occupancy permits will be issued in March, and workers will start in the building as early as April. It's a great news story for Alberta for generations to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Castle-Crown Wilderness Area

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our current Premier has achieved the highest level of postsecondary education since Alberta's first Conservative Premier, Peter Lougheed. However, in response to my Castle concerns questions yesterday, the Premier stated: "What we're talking about is an area where there is abundant habitat. We do have wildlife that's thriving." My questions are to the Premier or her sustainable resource representative. Is the government aware that in its natural state, without any human footprint, the Castle is part of a very narrow strip of forest that separates mountains from grasslands?

Mr. Oberle: We certainly are aware, Mr. Speaker. The whole point of forest management planning is understanding a particular forest in itself and in its context. I'm not sure what the member is driving at, but the Castle management plan was considered with great care, and we're well aware what natural forests do. I would point out that natural forests are burned regularly in our province

in the northern forests, and that's a part of renewal. Would he advocate that we allow forest fires to burn uninterrupted across the eastern slopes?

Mr. Chase: Obviously not, but forest fires are more productive than clear-cutting.

Is the government aware that not only is wildlife not thriving in the Castle, but there are most notably over 200 species at risk, including the grizzly and the cutthroat trout?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, forest management plans in this province are prepared with great care. They consider wildlife habitat needs, watershed needs, the full gamut of values in our forests, and I'm quite confident in this particular management plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the government honestly believe that clear- or block-cutting will not affect the ecological health of this region and its watershed? If so, please table the peer-reviewed scientific studies which substantiate your failed forest management plan.

2:30

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, then I have to jump back to the fact that we have been logging in the Castle at some level for a hundred years and full commercial logging for 50 years. The landscape that we see in the Castle today is a result of that logging. The habitat types that we see today, that are draped on that beautiful landscape, are a result of that logging. Not only has it sustained jobs and communities and families in Alberta; it has sustained wildlife habitat, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Grimshaw Holy Family School

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was indicated here in the House, Holy Family school in Grimshaw is on the verge of collapse. An independent report said that all systems are beyond their useful life. This means that electrical, plumbing, heating, mechanical, and insulation systems are beyond repair and must be replaced. To the Minister of Education: what steps are being taken by your department to address Holy Family school's critical infrastructure needs and to keep its students safe?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I have personally toured that school, and I have to tell you that I was very much disappointed with the state of the physical shape that that particular school is in. I'll be the first one to tell you that I am not surprised that parents of these children are not happy with the condition of the school. However, I have to tell you that parts of the school were built in 1962, parts in '64, in '67, and in '89, and even the part of the school that was built in 1989 is falling apart.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the independent report also said that repairing Holy Family school and bringing it up to code is nearly the same cost as building a new school for 12 and a half million dollars. To the Minister of Education. Infrastructure and mechanical systems are failing, and ongoing maintenance is a drag on limited resources. When will the families, students, and staff know whether Holy Family school is part of Alberta Education's new capital plan?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, there are two issues to address. Number one, obviously kids need a better school to go to, and we are working on a plan to make sure that that happens.

I have some additional questions. How is it possible that parts of a school that were just built in 1989 are crumbling and the school is ready for a bulldozer? Most of those kids, actually, after school are going to homes that are older than parts of that school and that, I'm sure, are in a good state of repair. So I will also be looking at the level of maintenance and whether the school is being maintained properly so that we don't see taxpayers' dollars being spent in a manner that 20 years after construction, the school is crumbling.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the school division has spent nearly \$800,000 on maintenance and operating costs for Holy Family school over the past 10 years and given that the division would rather use a portion of its operating surplus to build a new school rather than pour money into crumbling infrastructure, will the minister partner with the school division to build a new school in Grimshaw that will serve students for many years?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would be more than willing to partner. While the heating and the cooling in the school are not working, while the electrical and plumbing systems are failing, I will be looking at partnering by way of utilizing the \$7 million that that school board has in its savings account, using some of those dollars towards, perhaps, building a new school. Again, the question still is: how is it possible that a school is in this condition and kids are wearing winter coats during class time and the school board has \$7 million in an operating account?

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

Electricity Prices

(continued)

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, it was already clear from the way the Premier avoids responding to most questions on electricity deregulation that she doesn't know the file, and her attempt at a response in question period yesterday confirmed her ignorance. I expect she's being fed this ignorance by the Minister of Energy. So to that minister: will he admit the truth, which is that regulating the price of electricity does not require the provincial government to take on any debt whatsoever?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the facts speak for themselves. You look at the other provinces that have Crown corporations where the Crown takes the responsibility for generating. The costs that I indicated earlier, \$11 billion, the costs here since 1996, that are not borne by the taxpayer, are private investors. We look at Ontario and Quebec with debt around their hydro at \$36 billion and \$62 billion, respectively. The facts speak for themselves.

Dr. Taft: Well, again to the same minister: given that the regulated system, which Albertans enjoyed until this government shattered it, could compete with and often beat any other electrical system in North America without any investment or debt at all by the provincial government, will this minister admit that his defence of electricity deregulation is half baked and misleading?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to be living in

the '80s and '90s. I'd remind him that in this decade Alberta is growing rather quickly, and the world is changing. I refer you to the study that I tabled yesterday, London Economics International. It shows that in nonhydro jurisdictions Alberta for the last decade compares completely favourably with other nonhydro jurisdictions.

Dr. Taft: Well, again to the same minister: given that the only advice this minister had for Albertans facing exorbitant power bills was to tell them to phone 11 different companies and compare rates, when in every other province people automatically get lower rates without any hassles, any trips to websites, why does this minister insist on sacrificing the money of ordinary Alberta families instead of just returning to regulated rates?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite always seem to think the solution is more government involvement; we don't think so. The facts speak for themselves. I'm happy to repeat what I said yesterday. You can pick up the phone today. Albertans have a choice. Other provinces don't have a choice. You can reduce your electricity rates by the end of this month by 40 per cent by going to a fixed-rate contract.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Trades Opportunities for Armed Forces Veterans

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology announced support for helmets to hardhats, a program designed to assist Canadian Forces members in making the transition from active duty to full-time employment in the construction industry. My son is retired from the military, and even though he's not employed in the construction industry, I see that this program appears to have considerable merit. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Based on the relatively low take-up of a similar program in the United States, will this program have an impact on the predicted labour shortage that our province is forecasting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know every member of this Legislature and this government have great respect and admiration for the members of our armed forces. You know, this program that we're talking about, whether it helps one veteran or 10,000 veterans, is just the right thing to do.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, my second question is also to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Your department is only recognizing military credentials in 10 trades. With over 60 trades and designated occupations, why hasn't the province opened up more opportunities to armed forces personnel?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for that message. In fact, we're the leader in Canada, recognizing more trades than any others, but we continue to work with our armed forces and the federal government to look for other trades that we can bring in and continue to make part of our red seal program here in Alberta. So we will continue to work with our armed forces partners to find ways to bring more of our veterans into our trades in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. The government of Alberta has committed funding to the program's development and a website, but are those measures enough to bring more soldiers into the trades? In particular, what communication strategy is proposed to attract retiring members of the military?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have created the website to make access easy for our veterans, but we also do a number of other things – attending trade shows, going directly into bases and working with the members there – to try to ensure that they know that there is an easy and a smooth transition as veterans into our trades in this province of Alberta. So we'll continue to look at ways to streamline our processes.

Thank you very much.

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

Provincial Budget Projections

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The 2012 budget estimates for nonrenewable resource revenues are fairly optimistic. There are a few areas that have particularly caught my attention, and I'd like some clarification. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Can he please explain to me the policies that his department has for forecasting the price of oil and gas today and into the future?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, our forecasts are optimistic; we're happy to report that to Albertans. We do those forecasts based on our predicted supply and demand, the balance between supply and demand, and then we compare those numbers with private-sector analysts, banks and other private-sector analysts. I'm very pleased to tell the House that both the price for oil and our projected price for gas for the next two years are actually slightly under the average of private-sector forecasts. So it's a very responsible prediction for future revenues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. It's noted in the budget that the greatest increase in royalty revenues over the next few years is going to be in bitumen royalties, where we'll see a jump from about \$4 billion last year to almost \$10 billion in '14-15. Can he explain how his department specifically came up with these numbers?

Dr. Morton: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to report those numbers to Albertans. Partly, this very significant increase in royalties from bitumen is due to increased production and also increased prices. The real key is that in the next three years we'll see 13 new oil sands projects move from prepayment to postpayment royalties, at which point the royalties double and even triple depending upon the projects. That explains the dramatic increase.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister, and it's in the area of bonuses and sales of Crown leases. They've averaged about \$1

billion a year over the last few years, yet I notice that the number is going to increase to about \$2 billion. Can the minister explain how he came up with those numbers?

Dr. Morton: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's based on analysis of commodity prices and industry cash flow that we come up with those numbers. I would point out that while \$2 billion is higher than the average over the last decade, it's actually a billion dollars lower than how we've come in in the 2011-12 budget year. Again, it's a very responsible and relatively conservative forecast of revenues from that source.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question-and-response period for today. Nineteen members were recognized; 100 questions and responses were accommodated.

In 30 seconds from now we will proceed with Members' Statements, but in the interim can we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my member's statement earlier I talked about Leduc No. 1 and its importance to this province. In the public gallery are two constituents who are instrumental in this great Energy Discovery Centre that we have south of Devon. I'd like to ask Ron Pollock and Lynn Brown to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: In a few seconds from now we will continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Safer Internet Day

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each February we recognize international Safer Internet Day. You may be surprised to hear that Canadians spend more time online than any other country, more than 43 hours each month, which is almost twice the world average of 23 hours.

The Internet is an exciting and educational tool that can enhance learning and be an important part of our social lives, and I think many of us here can also vouch that it is an important part of our work life. E-mail, instant messages, blogs, chat rooms, online gaming, and other web tools are also becoming a large part of our children's lives. With all of this online access in Canada, children and youth can be at risk of being targeted by predators or becoming victims of cyberbullying. With our support and guidance young people can be empowered to discover the online world safely.

Mr. Speaker, parents and caregivers need to know where to turn for information and resources on this issue. The Alberta government has a number of resources to assist in engaging parents, children, and youth which can be found on the Human Services website. Albertans can use these interactive tools to help them talk about Internet safety with their children and families.

This year's Safer Internet Day theme is Connecting Generations and Educating Each Other, and I encourage all Albertans to keep the lines of communication open.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, would you like to participate?

Tribute to My Family

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As my time comes to a close here, I do have some people I'd like to recognize and thank, particularly my parents, Bob and Margaret Snelgrove, who get immense enjoyment – and I don't know why – watching question period every day. Not that it isn't exciting. Anyway, they'll have to find something else soon. They've been incredibly supportive. They say that I got my stubbornness from my dad and my fairness from my mom, and I'm not sure that they'll settle this argument. Mom and Dad, thank you so much for putting up with me.

Primarily, I need to thank my family. My four young children now are grown young men. When I go home, I see what an incredible job my wife, Bev, did with them. They give us tremendous pride every day. I watched them all play hockey on the same team on Sunday. So, Fred, don't cut health care. I'm going to try one game this year with them, but I may need your services after.

Mostly, Mr. Speaker, I have to thank my wife, Bev. The decade apart has been difficult, but in many ways it's made us grow together. She's an incredible girl, and where Old Father Time is dragging at me, she has maintained her beauty from the day we were married 34 years ago. As we start the next adventure in our life together, I certainly look forward to it. She's been my toughest critic. She's been my strongest supporter, a determined motivator with everything except that stupid exercise machine she wants me to get on, but with that, I'm sure I'll have time to do it. I want to thank her for making me the luckiest man in Alberta, and I look forward to the next life together.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a recent academic paper submitted to the Society for Academic Emergency Medicine. The authors include several notable Alberta physicians, Alberta Health Services, and the University of Calgary. These reports highlight operational policy changes made in Alberta emergency departments and hospitals which led to statistically significant decreases in lengths of stay and other aspects of emergency department care. These decreases occurred despite a very significant increase in the number of visits made to emergency departments over the same period. These policies helped lead us to significant reductions in the time required for EMS staff to off-load patients in our emergency departments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to table the requisite number of copies of the Alberta Economic Development Authority's annual activity report for 2011 on behalf of the Deputy Premier.

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 eight electricity bills Albertans have sent to the NDP opposition showing significantly high electricity costs.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today on behalf of the leader. There's a tabling of four different documents relating to media coverage of the tiff between the Municipal Affairs minister and the AUMA president. I have appropriate copies of those.

I also have eight copies of letters from individuals across the province who have been directly affected by the lack of mental health services in the province, with significant suffering for themselves and their families, including one from Cheryl Brown, who is in the audience today, relating to her son; Sally Hayward from Lethbridge, who was threatened and injured by her son because of inadequate treatment; Kimberly Porlier; and a number of other people across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling e-mails and 11 letters from the following individuals who are concerned about the proposed logging in the west Bragg Creek area, all of whom believe clear-cutting will damage essential watershed and recreation areas that thousands of Calgarians use to promote health and fitness and be detrimental to wildlife and natural species. They are Adam Storms, Sherri Rinkel Mackay, Heather Garipey, Susan O'Shea, Greg Potter, Laryssa Warne, Gaynor Hoyne, Annette Le Faive, Hugh Magill, Eric Tromposch, Troy Delfs, David Easton, Derek Abdalla, Liz Tassy, Margaret Main, Ralph Carter, Carolyn Fisher, Dr. Stephen McNeil, John Holmes, and Christine Rogowski.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today, and they all relate to the questions we have been asking in the last couple of days. The first tabling is a pamphlet that you can get at any casino or establishment that has VLTs. This certainly indicates that the house's edge, the government's edge, is 8 per cent in gambling activities.

The second tabling I have is a response dated December 21, 2011, to myself as chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. This is a follow-up response from AGLC from their appearance before the committee on November 30, 2011. Certainly, it is interesting to note in this document that they state that cash-in, cash-out totals for VLTs were not maintained after 1998-99.

The third tabling I have is a letter that I wrote on January 18, 2012, to the chief executive officer of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission asking a number of questions and pointing out that the response provided to all members of the committee and myself from the AGLC was not true and that there were cash-in, cash-out totals for VLTs after 1998-99.

The next tabling I have is a letter dated January 25, 2012, to myself, the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts,

from the office of the chief executive officer of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. This letter provides the cash-in, cash-out totals for VLTs and also the cash-in, cash-out totals for slot machines for various years. I appreciated the correction that the AGLC has provided to the committee. There's more work to do on that, but we'll get to it.

Now, the next letter that I have to table is dated February 2, 2012. It's from myself to the chief executive officer of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, and it's asking for information around the Auditor General's role in the accounting changes that were made in 1999-2000 at AGLC.

My last tabling is a letter that I received – and I appreciate receiving this – from the chief executive officer of the AGLC. This letter is dated February 13, 2012. It, too, is a very interesting read, and I would encourage all hon. members, including the Deputy Premier if he has time, to read all of this information before we get back to question period tomorrow.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On urgency, though, events in 1999 are not urgent in this Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, there have been occasions in the last number of days when members have given statements with respect to weeks, events, and the like. There is a moment now available for me to just alert all members that February does have some significance to a lot of other groups in our society. As an example, February is Black History Month. We've already heard of that in an eloquent statement by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. February is also Hearth Month, Junior Achievement Month, Psychology Month.

A number of various weeks are commemorated, as are days. February 1 to 7 was World Interfaith Harmony Week. February 2 was World Wetlands Day. February 4 was World Cancer Day. February 5 to 11 has been designated Burn Awareness Week, International Development Week, National Eating Disorders Awareness Week, National Therapeutic Recreation Week, and White Cane Week. February 6 to 12 was World Orphan Week. February 7 is known as Magha Puja, also known as Fourfold Assembly or Sangha Day for Buddhists. February 7 is Safer Internet Day. February 8 was Winter Walk Day. February 12 was Sexual and Reproductive Health Day.

February 13 to 19 is Random Acts of Kindness Week. That's this week. We all know that yesterday was Valentine's Day. Today is International Childhood Cancer Day, as it is National Flag of Canada Day. I would just like to point out that the only Assembly in this country, of the 15 of them, that actually has the flags of the nation and its provinces and the territories is this Assembly. No other Assembly in Canada does it.

February 19 to 25 is Brotherhood/Sisterhood Week, as it is Scout-Guide Week. February 20 is Family Day. February 20 is Heritage Day. February 20 is Maha Shivaratri, a Hindu festival dedicated to Shiva. February 20 is World Day of Social Justice. February 21 is International Mother Language Day, as it is Shrove Tuesday, or Mardi Gras's kickoff. February 22 is Ash Wednesday, as it is World Thinking Day. February 23 is National Aviation Day. February 26 to March 3 is Freedom to Read Week. February 27 is International Corporate Philanthropy Day, and February 29 is Rare Disease Day.

I think that's a wrap.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 3

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 3, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012.

The supplementary amounts provided by this bill reflect the fiscal picture outlined in the third-quarter fiscal update, released on February 9. These amounts are necessary for the government to conduct business and fulfill its commitments during the current fiscal year. The additional amounts are mainly related to grant commitments for the GreenTRIP, provincial judges, Slave Lake wildfire assistance, and funding for the assured income for the severely handicapped program and the persons with developmental disabilities program.

I certainly urge all of my colleagues in this House to support the bill, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise and speak to the supplementary supply bill, Bill 3. As always, concerns on behalf of Albertans that this government consistently understates budgets for the year, comes to the Legislature after the fact, and fails to anticipate a large number of issues – in this case one good-news story relating to PDD – and the tremendous backlog in supporting persons with developmental disabilities and those on AISH.

Why this couldn't be anticipated and dealt with in a timely way, why this particular group cannot be indexed as MLA salaries are indexed every year, with inflation and cost-of-living increases, is beyond us, and suddenly it becomes a supplementary supply addition that we vote on, well aware that this government continues to do just whatever it chooses without respect to proper budgeting processes and respect for the public purse. It doesn't seem to change. In my full seven years in the Legislature every budget has supplementary supply attached to it. One can understand forest fires and floods. Those cannot be fully anticipated although year to year there should be some predictability that we're going to spend something on those.

Again, on behalf of Albertans I think there are serious questions about the government's ability to budget, its willingness to hold the line, its willingness to use the public purse as it would choose as its own domestic budget and not make the necessary conscientious effort to research, to develop the full range of budgeting tools and look at the planning for the future with a more comprehensive lens and to try to in fact achieve a budgeting process that now our new Bill 1 is attempting to put a new face on, the zero-based budgeting process or what some are calling the results-based budgeting process. One can only hope, Mr. Speaker, that this will move us towards more responsible spending in a government that calls itself conservative but acts anything but conservative.

Still nothing for the savings plan – what is it? – 25 years since a great Conservative leader called Peter Lougheed initiated the savings plan. One wonders if there would even be a savings plan

in this province if he hadn't initiated that plan because nothing has been done with it since he left.

3:00

On behalf of the people of Alberta there are serious questions about this government's commitment to not only live within its means but to plan appropriately and budget for what Albertans care most critically about. Only recently have we seen a consistent budget for health care, a five-year plan that will provide some stability and some predictability to our health care system. There's still no clarity around seniors' care and how we're going to ensure that we protect and provide affordable, quality care for our seniors in these coming few years with the demands only increasing.

Recently we've also seen some movement towards a commitment to public education, but it's not at all clear that this will meet the needs when taking into consideration the maintenance budgets that are so often talked about in the House. Surely the government at this stage can manage to plan for both public education and postsecondary education in a way that includes capital costs and operating costs and maintenance. That shouldn't be beyond the reasonable expectations of Albertans who share their hard-earned dollars with this government.

The environment, too, is something that one would wish was being dealt with in a more consistent, stable, and predictable fashion because what we have seen is progressive erosion of that most important service that is designed to protect our economic future, ensure the reputation of our oil industry, and reduce the health risks associated with pollution and injury to our air, our water, our land, even our food products as a result, Mr. Speaker.

Supplementary budgets repeatedly coming forward without a sense of a long-term vision, without a sense of comprehensive research and being based on the best available evidence as opposed to simply building on what was done last year don't wash with Albertans.

We've heard recently about the failure of this government, also, to address a long-term commitment to poverty reduction, and it begs the question: when will we see consistent support for those with mental illness – I've talked about disability – those with addictions, and the homeless that are costing this government hugely in health services, criminal justice activities, and all kinds of care that is required as result of more emergency needs because we're not prepared to budget and plan for the long-term well-being of our most vulnerable populations?

We've talked in that context about establishing a fair tax system in this province. When will we see the rich paying their share, corporations paying their share, and all of us allowed to plan in a much more sustainable and responsible way so that supplementary budgets are not routine but are actually the exception? We on this side have talked increasingly about reviewing the tax system, ensuring that those over \$100,000 a year are paying more and that we eliminate this novelty in Canada called the flat-tax system and move to a more fair and progressive tax system for people who are earning up to a million dollars and paying at the present time the same percentage that the \$50,000 a year people are paying. Let's get serious about stable funding, predictable budgeting, comprehensive analysis, and responsibly managing the public purse that has been entrusted to us.

We know that there are going to be a large number of new Canadians coming into this province and coming into this country. Surely we can anticipate some of the costs associated with that and ensure that our budgets reflect a commitment to their cultural adjustment, their linguistic changes, their professional training, their ability to communicate. If we don't do that, we will be

coming again next year for supplementary supply for new Canadians and new Albertans, who surely deserve better.

On behalf of Albertans I think the opposition is strongly again suggesting that the government take very seriously their new Bill 1, which is going to be an attempt to review things in a comprehensive way before spending just the cost-of-living or inflation increases for many of these budgets. Look again at downsizing government, amalgamating departments that don't need to be separate. Look again at the carbon capture and storage fund for ways that it could reduce this demand on supplementary supply every year. Think about a fair tax system that would provide a much more stable base of funding and much more predictability, not this coming to the Legislature with cap in hand, assuming that everything that was spent in this past year without approval and no ability to reject it because of the consistent majority that the government enjoys.

Let's do better, and let's take seriously this effort of the Premier to start a more predictable, comprehensive review of budgets and stay within them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We're still open. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. On Bill 3, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, this is an opportunity to get a few matters on the record concerning the government's budgeting and finances. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View did a very good job of raising some specific concerns. One of the issues I want to bring to the table, Mr. Speaker, is how this bill fits into the larger budgeting process and the larger accounting system of the provincial government.

I think we should start from the premise, when we're considering a budget bill in Alberta, that Alberta is, by any reasonable measure, probably the richest place on Earth. We already start with an abundance of blessings: the land, the water, living in a democratic society, in a peaceful setting. But what sets Alberta apart from the rest of the world are two things. One is our relatively small population. We think of Edmonton and Calgary as big cities, Mr. Speaker. Take all of Alberta together and it's about the same as greater Seattle. It's not much more than metro Montreal in terms of population. So, that's one thing. On the other side, we are outright the owners of the largest hydrocarbon reserves – well, vying with Venezuela as the largest in the western hemisphere and second- or third-largest on the planet. What happens, Mr. Speaker, when you do the math there, you realize that per person we are the richest jurisdiction on the planet.

Now, you might argue that that's a bit simplifying things, but the fact is – and I think we have to remember this, every one of us as MLAs – that the people of Alberta, through this Assembly, outright own that resource. There was a very long struggle from 1905, when neither Alberta nor Saskatchewan was granted the rights that other provinces had, the rights of ownership for their natural resources, through a series of court cases, difficult elections, and so on, right through until 1930 when finally the federal government conceded ownership of natural resources to this Assembly. I look around this room. It must have been an astonishing day to be in this room when the Premier at the time, Premier Brownlee, stood up and announced, having negotiated the deal in Ottawa with then Prime Minister Mackenzie King, that the people of Alberta owned the resource. Little did they know at the time the incredible value of that resource.

Today we know the value of that resource. It's something like, counting the oil sands, 173 billion barrels of oil equivalent in proven reserves, using current technologies, that are owned by the

people of this province. If you do the math on that, well, the numbers very quickly become absolutely staggering. Imperial Oil tabulates on their books the value of their reserves, and they give them a value of about 10 bucks a barrel, Mr. Speaker. If we were to cut that in half, given that this is oil in the ground and so on and all that effort needs to be put into recovering it and extracting it, if we were to say \$5 a barrel for those 173 billion barrels, that's like \$800 billion in assets that this government owns on behalf of its people.

3:10

I would like to see something like that recognized when we're having budget debates of all types, whether it's supplementary supply, interim supply, or the full budget. This really is the richest place on Earth, Mr. Speaker, and there's no excuse in my mind for there not being something in this Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act that actually allocated savings into – I would like to see it – the heritage fund. Wouldn't it be exciting if this bill came forward at the end of the year like this and said: we're not just covering expenses for forest fires and other expenses like that; we're actually chipping in a little bit extra at the end of the year into our savings account. Then I could really get excited about a piece of legislation like this.

My view – and it's widely held by lots of people of many different political stripes – is that the heritage fund needs to be at least in the \$200 billion range if we are to have a sustainable economy in Alberta, and by that I mean where we can sustain lower than average taxes and we can sustain good-quality public services.

So this Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, Mr. Speaker, while it covers some important spending, is missing, in my view, an absolutely crucial line. That's a line that would actually say: okay, we're going to put some more money into savings. If we could get to that point – and I hope under this government we do get to that point. Maybe it will be after the next election, I don't know. I hope we don't get there by cutting because, despite all the rhetoric here about overblown provincial spending, over the last several years Alberta's spending on public services: you know, some years it's high; some years it's low. It's about what you'd expect. It's the savings that we're really falling short on.

I would also like to see one other thing in the government's plans and in their budgeting and in their accounting, and that would be to follow the lead of private-sector energy companies and fully list the reserves as assets on the balance sheet so that we not only counted the money that was, you know, held in various government accounts and other assets that are there, but we actually reflected what we own as a government, and that includes the incredible energy reserves here. Then we would be able to look at that and get a proper picture of just how wealthy this province is. I think it would help frame better, more informed discussion about how we're going to take this province and keep it on track in the years and decades ahead, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to get those comments on the record as part of the context for this Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act. In terms of the act itself I think it's safe to say that our caucus is generally understanding. None of us like to see adjustments at the end of the year. It's good practice to stick as closely as possible to the budgeted figures. But in all honesty and in all fairness to this government, the margin of error represented by these numbers is pretty small. The budget targets have generally been closely met, and I should congratulate the government and the public servants, who worked so hard to follow those plans on that account.

There are other points that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has made in relation to other considerations for Albertans who face genuine hardships, but those are already on the record, so I won't repeat those. I just wanted to provide my sense of the context that would make this a better piece of legislation.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on second reading of Bill 3.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2 Education Act

The Speaker: Now the hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that I caught your eye again. I shall proceed with my comments. Thank you very much. I'm honoured to rise today and move second reading of Bill 2, the Education Act.

Mr. Speaker, this is an excellent time in Alberta and in Alberta's education system. The hon. Premier has made education along with health care, as you know, central priorities for this government. Alberta already has a strong education system, and we plan to make it even stronger. That is why we're bringing forward legislation that will ensure Albertans have access to education opportunities that are meaningful to learners, that support Albertans' goals as a democratic society and confirm our belief that education is a partnership between students, parents, teachers, support staff, school boards, and postsecondary systems, and that provide opportunities for success that will build a strong future for our children and our province.

This legislative framework, Mr. Speaker, is a very important step on our path. It will support our partners in education as they use their knowledge and expertise to provide high-quality education programs and services that are meaningful and creative and that deliver to the needs of students, society, and taxpayers. The changes are necessary to ensure that our education system meets the needs of students in coming decades.

As you know, the government has undertaken significant consultation to help define our desires and results for education in Alberta and to create an education system that inspires children and youth to achieve their maximum potential, a system that meets Albertans' needs and Albertans' expectations for developing engaged thinkers who think critically and creatively; ethical citizens who demonstrate respect, teamwork, and democratic ideals; and adults who live and work with an entrepreneurial spirit in facing challenges with resiliency, adaptability, risk taking, and bold decision-making. Bill 2, Mr. Speaker, provides the framework for a system that will do just that.

Over the past few months I've received a huge volume of input from students, parents, teachers, and the general public. That community contribution took the well-considered draft legislation introduced last year to a new level. We heard that we are indeed moving in a direction that reflects the desires and wishes of Albertans. We heard that we could strengthen two underlying and very connected principles of the act: the first, that all students are entitled to welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments; and the second, that education is a shared responsibility with clearly defined roles for its partners.

The first has been addressed by including in the act, Mr. Speaker, what is fundamental to the nature of Alberta and to the education system: that we will respect the diverse heritage and abilities of our society and that we will promote understanding and respect for others. Using the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act as important guides, the Education Act prescribes that all school programs must reflect the province's diversity and – it cannot be said too often – promote understanding and respect of others.

3:20

The Education Act is very clear that bullying is not acceptable and will be dealt with. We have granted school boards greater flexibility to address bullying in all of its forms, and we have directed them to use those new tools. We have confirmed that whether inappropriate behaviour occurs in or outside of the school, before or after school, or whether it happens on the Internet, it will not be tolerated, and it will be dealt with. We have defined bullying and linked our province to national activities by legislating our own provincial bullying awareness and prevention week.

Government, parents, classroom professionals, and school boards all want our students to keep their focus on the classroom results that matter most for their future. That is a key reason why this act stresses that addressing bullying requires boards to act in support of both students who are bullied and bullies themselves. Victims need help to regain a sense of security and self-confidence at school, and bullies need help to not only stop but to manage their negative and hostile reactions to peers and to develop more positive behaviours. This will help bring respect, compassion, and empathy more fully into school culture and will help our students to free their minds from worry so that they can focus on learning what they need to learn.

As I mentioned earlier, Albertans have called for the act to highlight that education is a shared responsibility. The kind of full-service support to students that Albertans want cannot happen without our partners in education: parents, teachers, support staff, trustees, boards, and students themselves. Ensuring that all students achieve their potential requires the collaboration, engagement, and empowerment of all partners in education. We have set out the responsibilities of students, parents, boards, and trustees not to create legislatively enforceable requirements but, rather, to clearly identify the expectations of parents and students to be active participants in education. Student responsibilities include actively participating in their learning, the learning of those around them, and the pursuit of educational success. Students are also expected to contribute to a welcoming, caring, respectful environment.

The new act puts the Minister's Student Advisory Council into law. It provides a way for students to share directly with the minister what they hear from other young people about their school experience. This will help to inform government about what is important to Alberta students. Ensuring that the student's voice has a significant role in the education system is important, Mr. Speaker, and I am really proud to formally make this council a part of our education system. The membership of the council will continue to change as our members complete their high school education, but their advisory work will continue to be an important way of honouring the student voice and of shaping the education system to meet the ever-evolving needs of our students.

The Education Act recognizes and reinforces the crucial role parents play in their children's education and supports greater co-operation and communication between parents and school personnel. The act makes it crystal clear that parents have the

responsibility to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children and to play an active role in their children's educational success. Access to information, Mr. Speaker, is stepped up under the 10-point plan, and this act includes new audit requirements that require boards to broaden the composition of the audit committee. With all elements of the community working together as partners in education with the common goal of providing welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments, we will all benefit from our students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values when they mature.

In supporting diversity, Mr. Speaker, the act gives boards and schools greater flexibility to support inclusive education and children who require additional learning supports and programming through the delivery of specialized supports and services to students that have identified needs. Learning environments that respect diversity nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self, helping to create and maintain a welcoming learning environment.

We need to do more to support high school completion, Mr. Speaker. While Alberta's high school completion rate has been steadily improving over the past five years, it is still nowhere where we want it to be. The Education Act will raise the age to which a student is required to attend school from the age of 16 to the age of 17. I would like to credit the hon. Member for Little Bow for originally raising this issue and the previous Legislature for recognizing the good that this will achieve. We want students to finish high school, and we are increasing their ability to do so.

This act will also raise the age to which students are eligible for high school funding from the age of 19 at the beginning of the school year to the age of 21. Many students who drop out of high school return after one or two years, and we want to ensure that finances are not a barrier to high school completion for these particular students. What does not change is that school boards will continue to make decisions relevant to how to meet the needs of older students.

Another change in the Education Act which will have a positive impact on high school completion is that we have changed how a student's residence will be determined. Residency will now be determined by where the student lives rather than where the student's parents live. This reflects our increasingly mobile society, helping students and families to make the choices that are best for them and to support a more student-centred system.

Because of our strong commitment to closing the educational achievement gap between aboriginal and nonaboriginal students, we will continue working very closely with aboriginal peoples from around the province and, as I mentioned when announcing the 10-point plan, with federal government. We all recognize that high school completion is an important pathway to achieving economic and social success for aboriginal communities throughout Alberta. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, this is the case for all communities.

Another way the Education Act will play an important part in the province's future is by elevating collaboration among school boards, postsecondary institutions, and the community to make the transition between secondary and postsecondary education a smooth one. It benefits everyone when students continue their education within Alberta and become lifelong learners in search of further educational or career opportunities. Alberta Education already awards high school credits to students who are registered in and successfully complete off-campus programs such as work experience, a registered apprenticeship program, and the green certificate program. Greater collaboration between K to 12 and the postsecondary system will enable Alberta students to take advantage of new opportunities and ensure their place in the

economy of tomorrow. This act expresses and advances a sustainable vision for our future because knowledge is a resource that can never be depleted.

Today's students are often described as the Net generation because an ever-larger portion of their learning, in fact their lives, is spent online. That is why this act is not just about bricks and mortar schools; it's about building the connections and networks that are needed to improve the quality of education for Alberta children and youth. The integration of education and technology is allowing students to use the latest technology and techniques, the same kind of tools they may be using in the workforce. The alternatives for individualized, flexible learning are improving every day, and they are firing students up through engagement opportunities and choices.

The Education Act respects that education occurs in an increasingly diverse range of learning environments. It recognizes the importance of choice and confirms our ongoing support for public schools, separate schools, private schools, francophone schools, charter schools, and home education. Our government will continue to support and encourage parents to exercise choice as to how education is delivered to their children. As in the School Act we continue to define school as the principle of a structured learning environment with expected educational outcomes. The Education Act, therefore, maintains programming approaches, including alternative programs offered by school boards, charter schools, private schools, and home education.

The dimension of separate schools as part of our publicly funded education system is an important element of our system, so we have proposed several changes that are designed to modernize the process for establishing separate schools. This process allows for greater community engagement while not altering the constitutionally entrenched minority denominational rights. In addition, Mr. Speaker, separate school electors will now have a choice as to which jurisdiction, public or separate, they may vote or run for election as a trustee. This allows members of a minority faith whose interest lies with public schools to have representation on the public board or be on the public board themselves.

3:30

We have made some changes in the Education Act that relate to governance, which we believe will improve community engagement, create new opportunities for boards to be responsive and creative, and increase collaboration and co-operation between boards and other educational partners. One of these changes, Mr. Speaker, is to provide authority to appoint First Nation trustees when there is an educational service agreement between the First Nations and a school board. This will bring a new perspective to the board and address the principles of inclusive, equitable access and expanded governance team.

A change from School Act to Education Act is that new legislation will grant school boards natural person powers. Under the School Act boards are limited to doing only the things that are specifically authorized or required. Providing natural person powers gives boards greater opportunity to be responsive and creative in dealing with educational needs within their jurisdiction. Taken as a whole, the act holds boards responsible for reflecting a student-centred focus and the principles of inclusiveness, diversity, and excellence.

Passage of this act, Mr. Speaker, will enable Alberta to build on our incredible foundation of excellence. It is all part of our plan to give young Albertans access to a full range of educational opportunities, opportunities to realize their dreams. Once the act is passed, regulatory and policy reviews will take place to ensure that all of the regulations align with it. This will be an opportunity

for parents, teachers, trustees and board, and community to influence and provide input to regulations and policies. This new legislation will not be proclaimed in force until the regulation and policy review is complete.

This act of the Legislature supports change, but it is the people who live education each day who will implement it across the province, and a wide system it is: nearly 600,000 K to 12 students across the province, 298 school authorities, 2,134 schools, and more than \$34 million invested in students every school day. From stakeholders to students, from policy-makers to parents, Albertans have told us what they want an educated Alberta of the future to be like. They have helped us develop legislation to make that desire come true. We know that the legislation which recognizes choice, creates partnerships, establishes accountability, and provides opportunities for success is the foundation on which we will be building a strong future for our children and for our province.

Supporting this bill going forward makes good sense, Mr. Speaker, and good governance. I imagine looking back in the years ahead and knowing this was the legislation that put our students first and our province on an exciting, engaging, and values-driven new learning path.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill as we continue to debate it. Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and a privilege to stand and speak to Bill 2, which looks like a very progressive piece of legislation on the surface of it. I mean, the devil is always in the details. When we hear about issues related to bullying prevention, stronger partnerships between parents, trustees, and boards, stronger partnerships at post-secondary institutions, these are all good directions to take. I commend the minister for taking hold firmly and advancing some of these issues because, surely, we cannot continue having the highest dropout rate in Canada in our secondary schools, especially challenging with the needs of our First Nations and Métis and Inuit populations. It's nice to see a stronger focus, better representation, and higher commitment to inclusive learning environments for them.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Just to highlight for the record, this bill's purpose is to focus on inclusive educational environments and concentrate on decision-making powers with local school boards. Some of the issues that it brings up within the body of the document, I'll outline seven new commitments the government is making.

First of all, companies may apply for the establishment of a charter school. That's something new, and I'll be interested to hear more debate on that: what kind of companies and who benefits, what kind of extra charges might be associated, whether these are going to be exclusive or inclusive schools, and how much the public purse would be supporting these. Second, it allows parents more access to information on their child's education, a positive thing to be sure. Third, it puts in place an expanded audit committee involving third parties, making sure that school decisions reflect the goals of students and their communities. Fourth, relating to bullying and a student advisory council, it clearly shows some forward direction in dealing with this scourge that has to be addressed more directly than it has been. Fifth, students will be challenged to be more responsible for creating welcoming environments and respect for diversity. Sixth, the parents, boards, and trustees will be truly recognized as

partners in the educational development. Finally, boards will work with postsecondary institutions to create more partnerships and codes of conduct.

I would like to acknowledge specifically the commitment to raising the age of compulsory education from 16 to 17. Increasing the age of access to high school from 19 to 21 so that young adults are fully funded to upgrade when they haven't made it through the system in the average time, that's a positive one.

I'm not sure about the meaning of school boards having natural person powers. We'll be interested in hearing more about that discussion: what it means in terms of decisions made by boards relative to, say, school fees, what it means in terms of new directions in the school, what it might mean in terms of lawsuits against school boards.

At the same time that we're giving school boards more power, it also appears that we're giving the minister much more power. How is that going to be addressed and balanced? Obviously, there are concerns always at the shared balance of power between the minister and the elected boards, so there will be lots of discussion, I'm sure, around that.

Updating the processes for establishing separate school districts is a welcome decision, as there are contentions there and we do need more clarity and guidelines.

Providing criteria for the establishment and operation of charter schools: I'm puzzled by that one, Mr. Speaker. I would have thought that the criteria for the establishment and operation of charter schools was well established, and I'll be very interested in following the debate and the importance of that issue.

Redefining the definition of resident and independent student.

These are all good initiatives. It appears to be less prescriptive than the School Act previously, but, as I say, there are concerns around the new powers that it appears to be giving to the minister and his administration.

It says nothing about some of the issues the Alberta Liberals have been raising: eliminating school fees, eliminating private school funding, providing a breakfast and lunch program for children who are struggling to meet their basic needs as well as the learning needs of the community.

We also are on the record, Mr. Speaker, as supporting full-day kindergarten and preschool as important contributions to preparing children adequately for formal school and for success. We'll watch that with great interest as well.

All in all, there are some positive recommendations here, and I have no doubt that many of these will be fully supported. I look forward to hearing more discussion and debate about some of these issues and learning more about the meaning of some of these.

I will close my discussions and welcome further.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the bill.

3:40

Dr. Taft: Yes, on the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm starting to lose my voice. I'm sure everybody is sad to hear that.

This is a very extensive bill. I think it's about 200 pages long, so there's a lot of substance here. As the minister and others have pointed out, it's well over 20 years since we had a complete overhaul of this kind of legislation. I guess given the extent and importance and cost to the education system, it's not a surprise that it's a big piece of legislation, but what it does is it places a lot of demands on us to find the time and the resources to go through the legislation and to have a meaningful debate here. So I hope the government gives us ample time to do that. I do look forward to

comments from all sides of the House. I'm sure many of the government members will want to jump in after they do their homework and participate in the debate, at least I would hope they do that.

I want to start, Mr. Speaker, with the preamble because the preamble provides the context for the legislation, and I think some effort was put into the preamble over the last couple of years to make it as strong and compelling and perhaps even poetic as it could be. You know, regardless of whether it succeeded on those merits, I think it's worth commenting on some of the issues in the preamble. The second point in the preamble is: "Whereas education is the foundation of a democratic and civil society." I think we will have to read this entire legislation in that context.

I've slowly over the years come to the conclusion that the single most important thing that we do as a society is to educate our citizens. I have spent most of my career working around the health care system, and there was a time when I thought that providing public health care was the most important thing that a government can do. There's no question it's very important because without our health we don't have very much. But at this point in my life as I look at Canadian society, I actually have come to the point of believing that more important than health care is education. Perhaps the only thing that rivals that would be the work of the justice system because if we don't have rule of law, we don't have a functioning society.

I'm very pleased that the legislation emphasizes education as the foundation of a democratic and civil society. I was concerned over the last couple of years, as I'd heard that this legislation was in development, that it might come forward and say that education is the foundation of our economy and try to gear the whole education system not to educating citizens and building a society but to serving economic interests. I think that would have been a very alarming development because, after all, even the economy is here to serve society, not the other way around. I think evidence and history would show that if we educate citizens to be the foundation of a democratic and civil society, our strong economy will come along with that. I'm of the belief that democracy and civil society support a flourishing economy, not the other way around. If there was one that comes first, to me it would be civil society. So I'm quite pleased at that framing in the legislation.

The preamble continues in that vein. I find all of that hopeful here. When we're in committee, Mr. Speaker, we'll have an opportunity to go through this clause by clause, so I won't bother with that right now. But I do want to make note that the preamble is good, it's important, and I would commend it to all members of this Assembly as a little bit of reading and indeed to anybody in Alberta with an interest in the education system.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View commented on a handful of items, and a couple of those I just want to also repeat and emphasize. One of those is an issue that I've brought over and over to the floor of this Assembly for many years, and that's the issue of school hunger. It's a difficult issue to convince people about because there's a kind of disbelief. I say that because I was in the same position. Years ago when I first began being told about hungry kids in school, I thought: "Oh, come on; this is Alberta. It can't be that way. Maybe some kid slept in and didn't get breakfast, but there can't possibly be widespread hunger in our schools."

I've come to be taught the sorry lesson, Mr. Speaker, that in fact there are thousands of kids in Alberta who go to school hungry every day because they don't come from functioning households, functioning at least in the way we would think, where the parents make sure there's food in the fridge and the kids are up and fed and so on before they go to school; maybe they're given a lunch

on their way to school. Unfortunately, thousands of kids go to school without that kind of support, and it is a fundamental failure of our society and, I argue, of this government that that's tolerated. I don't think that issue is addressed in the legislation. I might be wrong. But I would love to see, for example, something in the preamble about ensuring that children or students who attend school have adequate nutrition.

I'm not arguing for a lunch for every kid in every school in Alberta. We don't need to do that, and we probably shouldn't do that although there are jurisdictions that do in the world. I am arguing for targeted programs for at-risk populations. To me, that's every bit as important an investment, in fact a precursor investment to our investment in education because if we don't make that investment, then all the money we spend on teachers and schools and books and computers is for naught. That's something I'll be looking for in the legislation. From my first review of it I don't think it's addressed.

I am also wanting to examine this act for what it says about the needs of our First Nations, Métis, Inuit, aboriginal populations, and indeed immigrant populations, but I'll separate those. In Alberta there's a very large aboriginal population, and it's growing far faster than the average of the rest of the population. A very, very significant portion of our aboriginal population are children. We owe a duty to those children and we owe a duty to our society to make sure that they are given every equal advantage that other Albertans get in education.

I'm quite sure the minister is aware and sympathetic to the concerns that the resources and financing given to schools on reserves don't match what's given elsewhere. Reserves, we all understand, are not the jurisdiction of this government, but sadly when people living on reserves are not well educated and they drift off the reserves, they do end up as a responsibility of this government. So we have an interest as a government and we have a deeper interest as human beings to do a better job in educating our aboriginal people for everybody's benefit.

I know from my first glance at the preamble that that spirit is probably in the legislation, but I don't know whether the word about that is in the legislation, and I will be looking for that. It may not be in there directly. Maybe it's in there indirectly in sections under funding and resources or something like that. That'll be a real concern of mine.

3:50

I also want to get on the record an issue that was raised in question period today and I think was raised a few minutes ago by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, which is around school fees. This is an active debate and will probably remain an active debate in the Legislature. There is a clear trend in our education system for fees to grow to not only ever-larger amounts but to cover ever-broader responsibilities. There was a time when fees were essentially there for things that were purely extras: a field trip to the zoo or the uniforms for the school track team when they went to the grade 6 track meet, things like that.

I remember as a kid that there were bake sales at schools. In fact, I got in trouble once because my mother baked brownies for the bake sale at the school when I was in elementary, and she gave me the plate of brownies to deliver, along with a couple of my friends, from home to school. Boy, those looked like good brownies. The next day my mother – darn it, anyway – phoned up and asked the head of the home and school association how the bake sale went: "Did the brownies get a good price?" The head of the home and school said: "Sorry, Mrs. Taft. What brownies were those?" Now we were caught; we'd eaten the brownies. Anyway, that was the kind of level that school fees used to be at.

Now, I think all of us have schools in our constituencies where the fees go way beyond that. There are fees for things that would generally be considered fundamentals like library books, special fundraising programs, including casinos, for schools to pay for computers, and on and on it goes. I think we have to have a more serious debate about how we solve that problem and make sure that fees are not an obstacle to children attending school or that the lack of fees doesn't mean that a school ends up providing a worse education because it can't afford the extras that are, in fact, essentials. So school fees come up a lot.

I'm also noting, as I first look through this, that this legislation is consistent with legislation in general; it empowers the minister more and more. More and more details are just taken out of legislation and put into regulations. That means they're taken out from the purview of this Assembly and put into the purview of the minister and of the cabinet. That raises a lot of concerns. It certainly provides more flexibility, but it does raise questions around accountability, influence, and even the whims of the day that may be affecting politics at any given time.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will wait and see what else is said in second reading, and I look forward to more extensive debate when we get into committee. I don't know if the government is a hundred per cent committed to this getting passed into law this spring. The minister is saying yes, so I guess we'll have lots of time with it. I know it was introduced in an earlier version last year and very wisely, I think, left to sit on the Order Paper so that there could be widespread review and consultation. I wish the government did that more often. I do now see from the actions of the minister that this time it's determined that this will get through the Legislature. That's great. Let's have an animated debate.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on second reading of Bill 2, the Education Act. I want to congratulate the minister and his predecessors for the very large amount of work that obviously went into this, a large amount of consultation. There are many good things in this act, and we'll get into some of the things that I think could be tweaked in a couple of sections to make it an even better act when we get to Committee of the Whole.

Today I wanted to give kind of an overview of what I would like to see in our education system, and of course there's no better time to discuss it than now since this act covers so much of what we're trying to achieve in the education system in Alberta. Of course, I will have some good things to say. I will also have some criticisms of where we've come from on a few things and some suggestions of actual solutions. So I hope that the Assembly and the minister will give at least some time to listen to this and, hopefully, implement some of the suggestions.

Ensuring that Alberta's children have access to a world-class education is one of the most important roles the provincial government can play in building our province. In partnership with the important core values taught by parents, education provides a launching point for a healthy and contributing citizen. To deny a child a proper education is to greatly increase the risk of losing that child to ignorance, poverty, and even crime.

The provincial government currently spends more per capita than any other province on education. Although many of those dollars are sent into programs and to the front lines where they are

needed, the problem is that hundreds of millions of dollars are wasted and often misallocated by what has become a massive, centralized bureaucracy at the Legislature and a lot of political decision-making. As we have seen with the new Alberta superboard, placing control of program and service delivery in the hands of a large, centralized bureaucracy is a recipe for disaster. Even more disturbing has been the current PC government's record of selecting new school sites based on politics rather than actual need. It is far more transparent, efficient, and effective to decentralize decision-making into the hands of parents, local schools, and elected school boards. They best understand the needs of their students and would never think to play politics with our children's welfare.

An important feature of Alberta's education system is that it provides parents with a greater range of educational choices than other jurisdictions in North America. This is one of the strongest points of our education system. Although strong public schools are critical to our education system, Catholic schools, public charter schools, private schools, specifically nonprofit private schools, and home-schooling provide educational opportunities and teaching methods that are sometimes unavailable in our public system. In fact, our public schools have responded to competition from Catholic, public, charter, as well as private and home-schooling by rolling out a diverse range of excellent core and optional courses that are benefiting students across Alberta. Continuing to foster a culture of educational choice, innovation, and competition will pay dividends for our teachers, our parents, and of course for children for decades and decades to come.

As most teachers and parents well know, the traditional classroom model of a teacher lecturing students of the same age has become increasingly outdated. This type of system often results in gifted students having their potential restricted by peers who may not learn as quickly while students who have not grasped key concepts are moved on to higher grades and more complicated subject matter regardless of whether or not they are ready. This can result, of course, in frustration, the domination of a teacher's time by a few struggling students, and perpetual poor grades for some students, and frustration and poor grades can lead to behavioural problems.

Furthermore, all students respond to different teaching methods in different ways. The standard classroom lecture model may work well for some students, but for others it results in a constant battle to comprehend and to learn. Fortunately, emerging technologies and teaching methods make it possible to centre teaching on the learning needs of each individual student. Taking advantage of these educational advances will ensure that our children are able to learn at the right pace and in the right way for them rather than participating in the traditional one-size-fits-all approach.

Moving on to the area of special-needs students, something very near and dear to my heart, there are thousands of Alberta parents – and any of us who go door-knocking have met dozens and dozens, even hundreds of them – that have children with special learning needs. It is absolutely critical that we ensure that these students and their parents are provided with the funding necessary to address these challenges as early as possible in a child's development. Failure to do so can have catastrophic consequences for the child and the child's family and will result in massive, massive costs to taxpayers down the road.

4:00

Unfortunately, although our preschool programs for special-needs children are actually quite good, one of the best in the country if not in North America, our programs and our funding for

special-needs students in the grades 1 through 12 education system are chronically underfunded, frankly, and we need to do a better job. Often special-needs funding in the K to 12 system is difficult to access, with parents and teachers having very limited say in how it is best utilized. In most cases parents will want to work with their child's school to include their student in a regular classroom setting. When proper support is provided, inclusive education is very beneficial to both special-needs students as well as their classmates. Some parents may choose, however, a different option, and this choice should be respected as well. Each special-needs student is unique, very unique, and should in partnership with parents be considered and supported accordingly.

We in the Wildrose feel that Alberta's students and parents deserve improvement in their education system. They deserve better. So the following are several points that a Wildrose government, if elected or if in opposition, would push for in order to strengthen our K to 12 education system by implementing the following reforms. First, we would empower individual public, Catholic, and public charter schools by implementing a funding model that sends per-student operational and maintenance funding directly to the school each student attends while accounting for the fixed costs of schools in smaller rural communities. Individual schools would then be able to determine how to allocate those resources most appropriately, be that to hire more teachers, for new equipment, et cetera.

Second, we would transfer decision-making authority concerning the building of new schools away from the provincial government and place it squarely in the hands of locally elected school boards. This would be done by implementing a publicly disclosed and objective funding formula that grants capital funds directly to local school boards based on student enrolment, school utilization rates, student growth projections, and other relevant factors. We'd get them the capital funding that those boards need; they would decide where the schools are most needed.

Third, we would establish multiple pilot projects across the province where open enrolment and tuition-free public, Catholic, and public charter schools are committed to opt into what we call a competency-based learning and assessment education model. Students in these schools would have the opportunity to learn at a pace and in a way that is tailored to their individual needs and would not move on to more advanced material until they had demonstrated strong understanding of a previously taught subject matter. Students who learn at an accelerated pace under this system would also be able to obtain college- and university-level course credits while still in high school. Students that start falling behind in this new system would be immediately identified and would receive the support they needed to catch up to where they should be at their age level.

We need to end the days where we push kids almost like cattle through a stall just to get them to the next level so that we don't have to deal with them anymore in the grade that they're in. But we don't want to go to a system where if a child isn't excelling or passing a certain unit – they're not doing well in a certain area but are doing well in all the other areas – we fail them and send them right back to the beginning of their grade. Both are equally unacceptable. We've got to find a better way to use technology, to give our kids the learning opportunities they deserve.

Fourth, we would grant public, Catholic, and public charter schools more flexibility to offer a specialized curriculum track in the trades, arts, music, physical education, and in business. Also, we would protect a parent's right to choose what school their child attends – be it public, Catholic, public Charter, private, or home-schooling – and continue the current Alberta Education practice of permitting a fixed percentage of regular per-pupil funding to

directly follow a student to the nonprofit private school of their parents' choice if desired.

Next, we would mandate the public reporting of each school's graduation rate and overall subject-by-subject assessment results so that parents have the information they need to make informed decisions regarding their child's education.

Next, we would work with teachers and other educational professionals to replace the outdated and inadequate provincial achievement tests with a new standardized assessment model that evaluates a student's actual improvement and comprehension of subject matter and more effectively identifies where further learning is required. It is also important to ensure that teachers are provided with the professional development training necessary to implement such a model. In other words, Mr. Speaker, the PATs are very flawed, indeed.

However, they do serve a purpose. They do allow us to have some sort of standardized assessment of our students that is open to teachers, and we would not be in favour of just simply cutting the PATs in favour of not having them and not having any way to assess our students. I hope that the minister will not go down that road.

However, the PATs are flawed, so we need to look at a way that we can transition to a new assessment model using that competency-based learning method that was talked about earlier as one possible way to do it, where students aren't moved on in a unit until they've shown that they understand the material. This will give our parents and our teachers the ability to know exactly where their child is, where every child is at any one given time. They'll know exactly if they need to get more resources, instead of waiting two or three years later before they realize: "Oh, no. This child can't read. This child can't read at a fifth grade level, and he's in grade 7. This is a problem." We need to make sure that our learning assessment model gives parents what they need, gives teachers what they need, and gives students what they need with regard to knowing exactly where their kids are in the curriculum at any one given time.

Also, we would ensure that students are properly assessed and any special learning needs identified as early as possible in a child's development. We would mandate that adequate funding follow each special-needs student to the institution of that child's parents' choice to be used in a way that the parent and the school's learning support team feels will best meet the individual needs of the child. Right now special-needs funding is sent to the school boards, and they decide what to do with it. This model doesn't work. Every parent with a child with special needs that I talked to says the same thing: it doesn't work. The funding for special needs has to follow the individual child so that when a parent goes into a school and sits down with the learning support team and their child is assessed and is found to need X amount of support, that money goes straight to that child and not to the school board, which sometimes will hand out that money based on, well, different funding pressures and things that they're dealing with.

Finally, we would respect the choice of parents who wish to give their special-needs students the opportunity to attend the same classrooms as typical students wherever possible and ensure that adequate supervision and support is provided to each such student so that the classroom can remain a healthy learning environment for all.

Mr. Speaker, these are but a few of the ideas that we've been hearing as a Wildrose caucus as we go out and talk to folks. It has honestly been one of the most interesting and exciting areas that I have been involved with over the last two years, in particular, as Education critic. As someone who has four kids – two are in the public system; two are too young as of yet but will be there soon –

I feel very passionate about this. I want to make sure that they and their friends and all Alberta's kids have an education system that is second to none, is best in the world. We have a good education system now. We can do better.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

4:10

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to discuss today in this honourable House the Education Act as put on the floor yesterday and to give my initial comments on the act and maybe offer some ideas of my own and some concerns that I may have.

Although I am the Education critic and it might appear from question period that I'm oftentimes cranky and the like, I will fully admit that I believe students are learning in our classrooms better than they ever have before. I'm of the assertion that our public school teachers and the kids who take part in that system are learning great things and are going to do things better than we have in this generation, and they're going to find solutions to problems that we may have created amongst ourselves the last hundred years or so.

With that introduction, I also was reminded, doing some reading the other night, that the hallmark of any egalitarian society that recognizes equality of opportunity will be publicly funded education. Without a public education system where kids, whether they're born of a rich family or a poor family, whether able-bodied, whether disabled, whether they are the next Einstein or the next Madame Curie – we need a system that ensures that equality of opportunity exists. I think the glowing statement in regard to equality of opportunity has been and always will be a strong publicly funded education system to ensure equality of opportunity.

I'm always, too, wise to listen to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. When he goes before you, you are always captured by his eloquence and his reasoned approach to almost every bill he speaks on in this House. I know it will be a great loss when he retires as I have come to appreciate his comments and his commitment to not only this House but to things like public education very much over the years. He highlighted the preamble of this bill and noted that there is much effort put into crafting some of these sentiments and statements that, hopefully, will move the chains forward for the vast majority of Alberta students. As goes education, so goes Alberta. I'm hopeful that some of his words are recognized.

I, too, want to compliment some of the preamble. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was perfectly correct in what he said about the second line in the preamble. "Whereas education is the foundation of a democratic and civil society." He's perfectly right. School is where we learn to care, share, play, and even fight together and realize that at the end of the day we're all human beings and we all have many of the same issues at heart. What we learn at school and how we learn to get along in this fashion is how we will carry forth when we are older, when we are taking part in society in a fuller measure.

I like some of the language. "Whereas the role of education is to develop engaged thinkers who think critically and creatively, and ethical citizens who demonstrate respect, teamwork and democratic ideals." If we move forward, another one, it says that "the Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of an inclusive education system that provides each student with the

relevant learning opportunities and supports necessary to enable students to achieve success."

An inclusive education to me essentially represents the public school system. Whether you're born of a rich family or a poor family, you are going to be allowed to develop your skills in the most forthright and robust manner possible. That's, to me, what establishes an inclusive education system. That is the hallmark.

I know my hon. friend from Edmonton-Riverview hasn't spent as much time on the act or the preamble as I. There is one cautionary note in there and one tragic flaw that I see in the preamble, and it is significantly different from the previous Education Act, where it says in the second last preamble: "Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to providing choice to students in education programs and methods of learning." I'll describe a little bit of my concern over that use of wording and its change from the last act.

As many of you can see from my questions in question period, many in the last session and probably more forthcoming, I've asked the minister about private schools and the funding that Alberta gives to private schools, which is the highest in the nation. We are one of only five provinces who engage in this type of funding, and we fund private schools higher than any other jurisdiction. That's a fact. In fact, the rest of the provinces do not engage in this practice and, in my view, are probably stronger for it in the long run.

We look at this language of providing choice, and when I asked the minister this in question period, choice is commensurate with private-school funding, okay? That's what it means. That's what the minister by his answers in question period associates choice with. To me, that is an unneeded choice of words to put into a preamble in your Education Act. If you look at the old act, which came in in 1988, the act said that the government of Alberta remains committed to one publicly funded education system. It has evolved from there, where they have splintered off and funded private schools at, I believe, a 50 per cent funding level in the '70s to a 60 per cent level just after the 2004 campaign to a 70 per cent level after the 2008 campaign.

What we're seeing, in my view, that private-school funding has done is that it has served to divide communities rather than unite them. It separates children rather than uniting them, and that to me is something that governments should not be involved in. If people want to send their children to private school, sure. It's their right to do so, but that doesn't mean we have to fund or subsidize their choice in schools.

If you look around the province, in the main private schools charge larger tuition, in fact some schools very large tuitions, \$17,000 admission fees. Private schools take their choice of children. Many, if not most, do not accept children with disabilities, do not accept people with learning challenges, are able to pick and choose their students as they wish. One that I saw even makes students take an IQ test to see whether they are able to participate in that school. Further, we see that many private schools have become religious schools, where different people of different faiths can set up their school and receive government funding. Hey, I'm all for them being able to set up their school. We just don't have to fund it. Okay? They're religious schools. This separates society; it doesn't embrace it. [interjection]

4:20

The hon. minister will get a chance to get up and express his views on the Education Act, and I look forward to him commenting. Right now I'm giving my views. I understand they're not his views. I'm often refreshed by the fact that we don't all think alike in this room because oftentimes when we all think

alike, we don't think very much. I'll look forward to the minister's comments and his support of private schooling and his support of the voucher system and how we should be going on a more American model of schooling because that's been a real success. We'll point to that model, and the hon. minister can stand up and point to that model and quote to the hallmarks of how this has worked well for that society. I look forward to the hon. Minister of Energy's comments in defence of that system and how it's led that society forward.

Those are the principal things that I believe the government should . . . [interjection] The government, by only funding private schools to 70 per cent, makes the argument for me. If the hon. minister was correct, why isn't his government actually funding private schools to 100 per cent of the level? The Wildrose is advocating for that position.

The government, by its sort of middle ground, is self-admitting that they're not sure if this is right for society or right for all of their caucus. Unless I'm wrong in interpreting it in that fashion, that's what it says to me, okay? If this government truly believed what the hon. Minister of Energy was saying there, they would fully fund it 100 per cent. Why doesn't the government do that if they truly believe that? I think they realize that private schools and the continued expansion thereof lead to a breakdown in what our communities say. I look forward to the hon. minister giving his comments on that and why his government doesn't fund them to the 100 per cent level if he actually believes that this is the best way to go.

Nevertheless, I'll leave that topic for now and talk about some of the positive things I do see in the act because there are some positive things. We can look at the act in total. It is by most accounts a prescriptive document that allows a lot of flexibility for our school boards and the continued interpretation of the act going forward. That said, a lot of the devil is going to be in the detail. This act doesn't deal with funding models. It does not deal with how many kids are going to be in the classroom.

I'll note for the record that in 2003 the Learning Commission report came out with recommendations on class sizes that we have not yet come close to recognizing. Those goals and aspirations are not prescribed in this act.

I also know it is silent on school fees, okay? It's continuing, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview pointed out, to become a point of contention for many students, as I said in question period earlier, a tax by another means and an unfair tax for that matter, in my view. It doesn't deal with providing lunch programs in certain areas that may need them. Those are some of the things that need to be clarified, and then there will be ongoing issues that we debate in this Legislature.

I was, like I said earlier, encouraged by some of the things involved in this act. One of those was raising the age of attendance to 17. Although it's very difficult . . . [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any hon. member? The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Being someone who's been to public school, Catholic school, and private school, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Fawcett moved that a 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.

[Debate adjourned February 14: Mr. Kang speaking]

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the Speech from the Throne every year. We as Albertans get a sense of where the government will be going and where they are coming from. This province is a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. The wonderful people I serve in Calgary-Fish Creek let me know when they are unhappy about something, and if they have a problem, I try to help them.

Mr. Speaker, I door-knock every year, usually from May to September. I listen to what they, my constituents, tell me at the door, and I take their conversations to heart. Every month I post an article on my website called What's on Your Mind. It's not what's on my mind but what my constituents from Calgary-Fish Creek tell me. I have a good sense of what the people in my community feel on the issues.

I, like my constituents, am concerned with what I heard in the throne speech. I listened closely, and I read the speech again just to be sure. I was shocked – absolutely shocked – to hear the governing party take credit for the Alberta we live in today. I'm going to quote: "A little more than 40 years ago Alberta set out on the road to the modern age under the leadership of people with such foresight." [interjection] Mr. Speaker, you know you get under the government when you start having them yell at you when you're in the middle of the throne speech, doing a speech that represents what your constituents are telling you. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has the floor.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I was offended in a few ways; for one, by the attitude of the government and of all the parties that have spent too much time in power. It's that the world did not seem to exist before they took power. Quite frankly, that's arrogant. To pretend that this fine province and its fine people are a product manufactured by the governing party is an insult. After the throne speech you probably came away thinking that the PC Party invented the wheel and that they are the best thing since sliced bread.

Alberta has a proud history, and the reason for that is quite simple. It's the people of Alberta. The reason we have a successful economy is because of all the entrepreneurs out there building businesses and creating jobs. The only thing holding our health care system together is the hard work of our health professionals. They are the front-line workers like the doctors, the nurses, the LPNs, and all the other wonderful staff that are holding on for the sake of all Albertans. Alberta is great despite the governing party, not because of it.

Here's another quote that made my jaw drop. "Recognizing the need for imaginative new programs, it made bold decisions that built up the province we take for granted today." Now, if I'm reading that the way my constituents in Calgary-Fish Creek are, we're not grateful enough to the PC Party for the world we live in today. Quite frankly, I feel grateful to serve the people of Calgary-

Fish Creek and Alberta, not the other way around. Albertans built this province. They built the schools, they built the businesses, and they built the homes that we live in today.

I became an MLA because I believed in the Alberta advantage. I believed in a government that listened and was responsive to the needs of Albertans. What I liked about the Alberta advantage was that the government knew when to get out of the way and trust Albertans to lead it. Now the government is asking Albertans to get out of the way; the government has everything taken care of. I know my constituents don't feel the same way. They're nervous about a group of people who talk about discussions and conversations but do what they want anyway.

4:30

A saying has always stuck with me for as long as I've been in government. We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak. I certainly hope this government takes that quote to heart, so I ask: why does this government continue to assume they know what's best for Albertans?

I know that Albertans have and always had a pioneering spirit. To this day Alberta is a land that attracts people from all over the world. They come here for the opportunity and the freedom to make a better life for themselves and their families. That is their dream, and that is mine, too, and quite frankly we've succeeded. This is the best place in the world to live and raise a family and do business. We as Albertans create Alberta in our image. We decide; that's democracy. But I wonder if the Premier feels the same way. Here is another quote. "Your government will not miss the opportunity to reshape Alberta." Excuse me? Reshape? There is nothing wrong with Albertans. Quite the opposite, in fact. Albertans are the reason this province is great. What Albertans want is the opportunity, quite frankly, to reshape the government.

There is a reason why I'm no longer in the governing party. It was my choice and a difficult one at that. I've been privileged and I've been humbled by the opportunity to serve the residents of Calgary-Fish Creek. Quite frankly, they're my bosses. They're the people I always listen to. They told me what had been troubling them for some time: the government had stopped listening. It had all the answers no matter what the questions were.

Here's another quote that struck me. "Alberta's families and businesses have a government that will help them adapt and build a province that present and future generations will be proud of." Albertans know full well how to make the province succeed and how to create a province to be proud of. They don't know what results-based budgeting is. I wonder if many in government know either. What Albertans do know and what Albertans understand is that their budget is made at the kitchen table, where they decide the wants and the needs. I don't think the governing party is up to that simple challenge.

I am proud of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, at this very moment. I always have been and always will be. I don't think twice about saying it. I must assume, however, that this government under the Premier is not proud of Alberta. She must think that there is something wrong with its foundation. Is she ashamed? I have no idea why. Alberta is amazing. This province has been great to me, and there are millions out there that feel the same way. Why? Because they built it. They get their hands dirty, they put in their time, and they put in their effort. They made Alberta what it is today.

Nothing worthwhile is easy. We've earned the Alberta we have today through hard work and smart work, not because of the Premier's office. That's why I'm concerned when I read that "it's time for foundational change." The Premier thinks that with a change in the leader and some substitutes on the cabinet bench

we've started the foundational change. Quite frankly, that's completely wrong. The foundations of Alberta are not in the Premier's office or in the cabinet. They are in the people of Alberta. Alberta's foundation lies in the grassroots. There is nothing wrong with the people of Alberta. They elect the government; the government does not elect the people.

All I've seen in the last year from the governing party is lip service and, quite frankly, cosmetic change. Albertans are not fooled. They know what's going on in their schools, their hospitals, and their communities. If they'd been listening, they'd know that by now.

I'm hopeful, Mr. Speaker. I know Albertans will persevere and they'll succeed. Nothing will hold them back; nothing ever has. This government has a clear choice, listen or get out of the way.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on the throne speech.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the committee to order.

Bill 1 Results-based Budgeting Act

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to speak at Committee of the Whole on Bill 1, the Results-based Budgeting Act, of the government. I've spoken on this once before. The principle is good. There's no question that we need to evaluate how we're spending money, how we're deploying resources, how we're planning for the future based on results. I don't think anybody can challenge that need, and I'm pleased to see the government explicitly committing themselves to it.

As I mentioned yesterday in second reading, when we get to the implementation of this bill it becomes a problem. Are we going to be comparing results from last year? Are we going to be comparing results to the best in the world? Are we going to be looking at what prevention would result in, which is an absence of data in some cases. If alcoholism is not happening, if addictions are not increasing, if injuries are not happening, if people are being counselled and avoiding the use of emergency departments unnecessarily: we have to be clear about what the indicators of success are and what these results might be.

This government has not shown leadership on establishing some consistent baseline indicators of performance, whether it be in our health system or whether it be in our royalty system. Part of the challenge that we face as opposition is how one would begin to measure results from the budgets that are being spent, particularly when we don't see line items that indicate specifically where money is going. We see large expenditures. We see no clear indication of where one could expect results from a certain expenditure. So it's going to have to be a lot more transparent and a lot more accountable if we are to buy into this notion that the Premier and this government are serious about results-based management, starting from the ground up and looking at real results.

In addition, I guess, I want to ensure that we don't simply ignore the process. If all we're measuring is results, it's possible to create all kinds of statistics that show improvement. But if we're not looking at a demoralized population, intimidated staff, increasing sick leave, if we're not looking at departures from the departments, then we're not really looking at the whole result and not assessing the degree to which departments are actually inspiring their workers, engaging in constructive change within a department, and making appropriate promotions and demotions and firings in some instances.

A lot hinges on what this government chooses to define as results and whether they start to ignore the process of functioning of a particular department. I want to put on the record that when the rubber hits the road, the principle of results-based management is excellent. In practice it is very difficult to do in a way that is transparent, that is actually measuring the right things, and that is holding themselves accountable to not only better than last year in that department but the best in the world.

4:40

I would just put those caveats on the table and say that I personally support this principle, results-based budgeting. But I hope the government will take under advisement the concerns about defining those results and about not ignoring the processes going on in departments that would move us toward a sustainable, healthy work culture for the staff and the various officials in departments and that would actually result in substantial improvement not only in the department but in the population. Ultimately the results have to be measured in reduced wait times, improved health in the population, improved prosperity for average Albertans, improved care of people with disabilities and learning problems and addictions. If we don't see those kinds of results, Mr. Chairman, what are we measuring, and what are we basing results-based budgeting upon?

We'll be watching very carefully in the first year as I assume this will be enacted. We'll be watching very carefully. In fact, we recommended as an amendment yesterday through Edmonton-Gold Bar that we establish a committee of the House to actually hold us accountable for what is happening in results-based management and what kind of quality results we get and what kind of transparency we get from this government around what they're measuring, what they determine a success, and what they do about the unsuccessful aspects of a budget review.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll take my seat and open the floor to others.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[The clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Yes.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

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 Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 1.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the report from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, does this Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 3 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012

[Adjourned debate February 15: Mr. Denis]

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech (continued)

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 15: Mr. Denis]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on the speech by the Lieutenant Governor.

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my first chance to get up and respond to the throne speech, and I'm very pleased to do so. The Premier raised a number of issues. The Lieutenant Governor raised a number of issues in the throne speech that relate to the future of Alberta, the needs of our population in relation to health care, education, the environment, energy, a lot of motherhood statements that, really, many of us were left feeling rather pale about and lacking in serious direction except for her primary bill, that we've just passed.

I guess I'd like to say that the Alberta Liberals have a vision for Alberta. This caucus has put together an exciting and visionary platform for Alberta that I think Albertans will embrace. It has to do with a serious review and commitment to health care, beginning in prevention and ending in end-of-life issues that address not shortfalls of funding – we don't need more money. We need better management of the wonderful human potential we have in this province and the tremendous opportunity that's being squandered by not addressing poverty, not addressing seriously the challenges faced by persons with disabilities, children with

learning problems that need to be identified earlier, emotional and behavioural problems that need to be seen by mental health services, early signs of breakdown in families, and addictions that can be prevented by a proactive system that is actually based in communities. Primary care networks are a good initiative that this government has taken over the last seven years and now appears to be abandoning.

In the absence of a bigger vision from the throne speech, we are offering to the Premier and to this government and to Albertans a more visionary approach to getting back to basics, you might call it, Mr. Speaker, supporting people where they are, assisting them in their fundamental needs for food, shelter, clothing, and mental health supports, early intervention programs for kids and families that are at risk and in some cases in distress, and an ongoing set of community services which have been dramatically cut by this government over the last 20 years in spite of the wealth. We have compromised so many good support programs in this province and placed at risk and at huge expense, as the Poverty Costs report indicated last week, tremendous opportunities here for prevention, for early intervention, for more cost-effective services in this province.

4:50

That's just one aspect of what we would want to bring to the table as a throne speech that would inspire Albertans and reinspire the Human Services people, the child and family services people, mental health people, addictions people that we get it. We understand the primary needs of people and that the primary responsibility of government is to ensure that everybody in this place has access to healthy environments, healthy food, opportunities for advancing themselves educationally, occupationally, and vocationally, that we will do everything possible to create a level playing field for success and for reaching human potential in this province. So that was the big deficit for me in listening to the throne speech this year, the lack of any serious commitment to the people of this province and to prevention.

The other area where I thought we missed an opportunity and continue to miss an opportunity is talking about innovation in this province and talking about a knowledge economy but not investing in the innovation and postsecondary education system. It has to be much more accessible to people than it is today. It has to be much more accessible to those on low income and to those who struggle educationally but who have remarkable skills in many different technical areas and innovations that simply need the support of a system that wants citizens to be productive citizens, taxpaying citizens, and to fully reach their potential. Our postsecondary system is not being funded adequately, and we're losing tremendous opportunities economically, socially, and I think even in the environment because of people who are being excluded due to financial or other barriers. We simply don't have the capacity in our postsecondary system today.

The other area which brought me into politics is a stronger agenda for the environment. The environment was given nominal attention in the throne speech, but it is the primary resource. Everything else is a subsidiary of the environment. Our lives, our economy, our social well-being, our health: all of these depend on a healthy, sustainable environment.

Without a serious commitment to climate change and the tremendous impacts not only across the world where there are the most severe impacts but on our people with water shortages, depletion of food production, more difficulty with desertification, loss of forest cover, and impacts on water quality and quantity as well as new infectious diseases and extreme weather events, we are again not showing leadership to the world by dragging our feet, by

ignoring the international community's call for thinking about our young people, our future, the long-term well-being of the planet.

Instead of being the laggards, be leaders in climate change. Set absolute targets, not relative intensity targets. Set a price on carbon so that everybody is clear and fair about how we deal with these pollutants, carbon and other greenhouse gases. Set timelines and hold ourselves to it. Use the money that we get to invest in energy efficiency and new technologies that the rest of the world, including China, is going to lead the planet on.

We are going to be buying from China solar panels, wind energy, new technologies that will transform the energy future of the world, and instead of being leaders, we are dragging our feet and are focusing on a single resource because of short-term thinking and a lack of commitment to the environment, to the long-term well-being of our people and our planet.

Who but Alberta should be setting the stage for leadership on climate change? We have technology. We have science here that is beyond many countries' dreams. We have intelligent people. We have resources. We have opportunities that other countries do not have. We have a carbon-intensive economy. Let's show the world what a carbon-intensive economy can do to lead the way in reducing carbon.

Instead, we see, as I say, really regressive and apologetic decisions that protect, so called, an industry but actually have destroyed the reputation of our industry because we haven't taken leadership, because we haven't set standards and enforced standards that the world can respect. Again, as far as vision, this throne speech didn't give us that.

We have heard from economists across the globe that Alberta is not meeting its expectations, shall I say, regarding stable, dependable funding. We continue to live on a roller coaster, and this government has said that's good enough. We'll take what we get from our resources, we'll continue to depend for a third of our budget on oil wealth and land sales and not have a stable base upon which Albertans can depend for their basic needs being met: housing, nutrition, health care, education. That is an area where I think, again, this government is not prepared to be courageous and show leadership and establish a fair tax regime where all Albertans can be confident that they and their children and their children's children will have a solid base for well-being, prosperity, and meeting their potential.

I was pleased to hear the throne speech address new Canadians and the workforce that is going to be coming here and the commitment to supporting new Canadians. That is a very good and a very important commitment because what I'm hearing at the front lines is that many of these people are falling through the cracks, particularly professionals. Engineers, teachers, nurses, physicians who are driving taxis for many, many years and becoming depressed, engaging with the health care system trying to seek help for their problems, when they have such potential, such skills, if we can work with them more consistently, more appropriately and prepare them for entering our workforces, especially at a time when we're short of some of these professions.

It's distressing to see wasted human potential. It's distressing to see people suffering from lack of a service where some of these professionals could be providing it, especially in culturally appropriate ways. A large number in the Indian community are lacking culturally appropriate services, for example, or the Chinese community because they can't get appropriate, culturally responsive services. We have these people among us. Let's work with them. Let's invest in them. I was pleased to see some acknowledgement of that in the throne speech, so I will indicate support for that.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, it was a lacklustre throne speech that hasn't inspired many in this House and, I dare say, in the province. I hope that those who are working as officials in our Human Services and other parts of government, officials, front-line workers, take heart from some of the vision and challenges that the opposition throws towards the government because it's clear that this government has run out of ideas. They're tired.

They have done things in a certain way for so many decades that it's pretty hard for them to think outside the box, frankly, and a new face on the government doesn't actually do the trick. There are too many vested interests, too many debts to pay, too many benefits to be reaped by maintaining both the relationships and the decisions, the policy decisions, that continue to be made in this House for what I would call self-interest, political interest and not the interests of Albertans, certainly not the long-term best interests of our children.

With that, I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker, and offer the floor to others.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the throne speech.

Dr. Taft: On the throne speech, yes. It's a privilege for me to deliver what will be my last response to a throne speech. I think this is the 12th one I've heard, Mr. Speaker. While I appreciated the best efforts of the Lieutenant Governor to give it life, I also, like the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, found it to be pretty lacklustre. I've heard surprisingly little about it since it was delivered, which I think would confirm what most people have said. So I will, as promised, keep my comments fairly brief, but I do want to go through it point by point.

I did like the approach taken by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View when he alluded to some of the things that we as the Alberta Liberal caucus would like to see in a throne speech. I'm going to take a little bit different approach.

5:00

I do want to start on page 1, and I'll quote as I go along from the speech. At that point the Lieutenant Governor said, "In my lifetime alone, Alberta has come a long way." It certainly has, and I think it's worth all of us remembering that in one lifetime Alberta has gone from being the poorest province in Canada to in 1936 becoming the only province in Canadian history to default on its debt. That's how poor Alberta was one lifetime ago.

Today, as I was saying a little earlier in the Assembly, we are the wealthiest jurisdiction probably in the world. That's wonderful for all of us who have been able to ride that great wave of prosperity and wealth and advancement, but I think there are two or three lessons in that that we all need to keep in mind. One is just how much that really depends on one industry, one resource, the oil and gas industry, which the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon talked about today. He mentioned – I must say this – the discovery of Leduc No. 1 by "Dry Hole" Hunter. "Dry Hole" Hunter's son, who's now a retired or nearly retired schoolteacher, lives in my constituency, and "Dry Hole" Hunter's grandson is hoping to go to the Olympics in London this coming summer, competing for Canada in kayaking. So just a little aside there.

One of the lessons about this incredible wave of prosperity for Alberta is that it's all come on the back of one resource. The other is the sheer speed of it. Those of us here need to remember that just as over one lifetime we went from the bottom to the top, in one lifetime we can go from the top to the bottom, and if we're not careful, I'm concerned that we will, Mr. Speaker. If we don't do

things like build up the heritage fund and secure our long-term and build up a more diverse economy, the day will come – and it can be shockingly fast – when we are on a prolonged ride back to the bottom.

Mr. Speaker, on page 3 there's a glimmer of hope. It's pretty vague, but it's there if I look carefully. It's the third-last paragraph. It's the part of the speech that talks about reviewing the fiscal situation of Alberta, and I will quote here again. It says:

Your government will examine its entire fiscal framework to ensure it spends Albertans' tax dollars appropriately . . .

Then I want to emphasize this:

. . . while saving intelligently for your future and for generations to come.

This will include reviews of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust and Sustainability Funds.

I will end the quote there. I will be as thrilled as any Albertan will be if this government actually delivers on this and gets in place a framework that systematically and with real discipline begins building up the heritage savings trust fund and does it without gutting other public services.

There will be a lively debate, I'm sure, in the upcoming campaign between, for example, the Wildrose Alliance, which would, I think – I don't want to put words in their mouths – like to cut taxes and cut services and perhaps channel those savings . . .

Mr. Anderson: Don't put words in my mouth.

Dr. Taft: Am I putting words in his mouth? Okay. I won't bother. I won't be unfair. I'll stop there.

Certainly, our position is that there's ample wealth in Alberta to fund top-quality services while at the same time building up our savings.

That was perhaps the closest this throne speech came to inspiring me. Then at times I found the throne speech has fallen into a situation where words are cheaper than actions. On page 4 the throne speech talks about "enhancing our trade and technology institutes and colleges." Sadly, Mr. Speaker, when I look at the budget for advanced education, it's not even keeping up to inflation. This government is talking about enhancing post-secondary education, but its actions do not deliver on that.

Later on that page the throne speech addresses an important idea of recruiting more students from Métis and First Nations communities. I cannot emphasize how important that is for the future of this province. I've spoken on the floor of the Assembly and in the hallways of the building here to the Minister of Education about this, and I think he gets it. I think we all get it, but we need to deliver on those words.

Finally, in the last paragraph on page 4 there's a little bit of a mystery. The mystery is the reference to "the introduction of family care clinics." The mystery is: what the heck is a family care clinic? How does it compare to the primary care networks? Are we setting up a whole parallel system to the primary care networks? What's the difference between a family care clinic and the primary care network?

Dr. Swann: Do we need more experiments?

Dr. Taft: Yeah. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View is saying: do we need more experiments? Why don't we just bolster the primary care networks? Maybe they're a great idea, but I'm waiting for the details. I don't know that we need to get into a whole further system. Unless it's perhaps about some for-profit corporation coming into Alberta and setting up a whole bunch of these. I don't know.

Then there were a couple of lines in the speech that I thought were actually pretty bitter. They weren't meant that way, but I think they would have been felt that way by a lot of Albertans. On page 5: "A successful Alberta is one in which every Albertan is empowered to be part of the economic, social and cultural life of the province." Well, I agree with the sentiment, but this government consistently fails, and it fails in full and deliberate consciousness of its failure, whether it has to do with, as I will repeat over and over, the fact that every day thousands of kids six, seven, eight, nine years old sit in the classrooms of this province hungry through no fault of their own and this province refuses to do anything about it or whether it's so many other people who can't possibly go through their lives feeling empowered as part of the economic, social, and cultural life of this province because of the policies of this government. I'm sure it wasn't intended as irony, but it certainly came across as irony to me and perhaps worse, Mr. Speaker. But I don't want to get unparliamentary.

On page 7 – and that's the second-last page of the speech, so I'm coming towards the end of my comments – at the top of the page it talks about "the infrastructure necessary to get our resources to new markets." It doesn't specifically refer to the Northern Gateway pipeline, but that's probably implied here. I would just like to register my thought that we need to look at other ways, other routes, alternatives to the Northern Gateway, whether it's to different ports, whether it's through different means. I hope this government hasn't committed to one company's vision of how we build infrastructure to get our resources to new markets.

The next paragraph, I thought, was rather revealing about this government's real attitude to the environment. The only discussion about the environment in here is not about protecting the environment; it was about developing the environment. I would like to have seen something here about genuine environmental protection. Even more ironic was the claim on page 7 that "governments are now standing together behind a plan that is credible, science-based and fully transparent." I underlined in my copy the words "science-based," Mr. Speaker. The science of climate change is overwhelming.

5:10

Actually, there was a powerful column in today's newspaper written by a man who was a candidate for us in Calgary in the last election, and his name is Mike Robinson. He was the head of the Glenbow Museum, an accomplished recipient of the Order of Canada, a brilliant man. He's moved to the west coast of B.C. His column was about the different attitude in B.C. and Alberta to the issue of climate change. I won't go into the details there, but I want to drive home the point that if this government really is interested in science-based environmental policy, it would acknowledge the findings of the UN panel on climate change and the broad consensus of scientists from around the world and start to take more serious action on climate change. I think this government's policies are science based only when the science suits the convenience of the government, and that's a dangerous situation.

Mr. Speaker, I've consumed enough time. I got several points on the record. You know, I wish the government well in advancing a constructive, evidence-based, science-based future for Alberta, but I don't have my hopes very high for them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 1

Results-based Budgeting Act

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually rising to move third reading.

I think that everybody in this Chamber in their own way, maybe having regard to their own particular opinion, will actually agree with a lot of my comments today. Even if you don't, I do think that it's important to have a discussion about Bill 1.

Mr. Anderson: A wholesome discussion.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I do appreciate that as well.

As this member will also remember, back in 2009 the gentleman who's now the Minister of Municipal Affairs approached several people. He thought: you know, we support this party, but we want to see a bit of a different direction. Of course, many members, including the Member for Calgary-North Hill, soon to be Calgary-Klein, also joined us in this effort. We wanted to talk at the time about more program reviews, Mr. Speaker, realizing that we just can't keep on building bureaucracy after bureaucracy. I could go back to many quotes from Reagan or Thatcher that still matter today, but one thing that we wanted to do is keep spending growth to population growth plus inflation or less, basically ensuring that the government does not grow larger, at least on a sustained basis, than the private economy does in and of itself. Of course, it is my philosophy that the primary economic driver of this province, I'd say of any successful economy is the private sector and not the government in and of itself. The current budget, Mr. Speaker, does this.

I don't suggest for a moment that the Premier got the idea for Bill 1, that we're talking about today, from myself, from the Member for Calgary-North Hill, from the Minister of Municipal Affairs – I don't suggest that for a moment – but I can support it because it is very consistent with what we had talked about a couple of years ago. This bill reflects the fact that Albertans have expressed their concern that government be accountable and transparent in its budgeting process. It's not about hack and slash, slash and burn, whatever you'd want to call it. It's about being more effective. It's about being more efficient. Albertans want to be confident that the many important services and programs delivered by this government are not only effective but are also sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, when I was the minister of housing for just under two years, I applied this approach and was able to reduce our spending by 39 per cent without affecting service levels by engaging in private-sector partnerships. Some people in this Chamber may have thought, you know, that we shouldn't be doing this just for particularly ideological reasons, but it has worked for the taxpayer and for those in need of housing, particularly the homeless. I wanted to thank the Canadian Taxpayers Federation for speaking favourably about this approach, as they did in their magazine last year.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 will direct that each line item in a budget is re-evaluated on its financial merits. It will start with assessing whether a program is achieving its intended objectives and go on to determine whether they are being delivered in the most efficient and effective manner, and this will happen in every department over a three-year cycle.

Mr. Speaker, we can and must be better financial managers if we want to ensure that the Alberta we have today continues to be the best place to live and work for people of all ages and backgrounds. Bill 1 gives us the tools to achieve that goal. It will allow us to prudently align resources with expected results, and it underscores the need for stronger performance indicators to measure whether and to what extent these goals have in fact been achieved. Bill 1 will bring clarity and consistency to the government's current budgeting process so that we can confidently assure Albertans that their government is committed to being financially responsible with their valuable tax dollars.

I can tell you from my own personal experience that this is what I hear at my doors, this is what I hear at doors in other ridings, and this is what I hear constantly when I'm out speaking as a minister of this government. By focusing on objectives and results, output and performance, Bill 1 reflects this government's strong commitment to sound financial management and ensures that the government policies and programs are the right ones at the right time, today and for future generations.

Lots of talk from the opposition is about tax increases, and even though there are no tax increases whatsoever in this budget, we must remember that all governments in this province are granted by the people and not the other way around. The reality is that if any government allows itself to get out of control, what usually follows? Tax increases. Mr. Speaker, once again, there are no tax increases in this budget.

The other way to go through an initiative like this is to review each department's spending every three years. Mr. Speaker, I'd be very proud to have the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security be first to go through this process. I would consider it a privilege if that was assigned to me.

In closing, I would like to once again reiterate my support for this bill. This strikes the right balance between fiscal prudence, economic sustainability, and ongoing social responsibility. I think that all of us can congratulate the Premier in her first bill as Premier for putting this as the number one priority, financial and fiscal accountability.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to join in? The chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 1, the Results-based Budgeting Act. It's an honour to speak to this, the first bill of the Fifth Session of the 27th Alberta Legislature. As a proponent of strong fiscal planning I am pleased to see that our budgeting process is evolving in this direction. It is not always easy to demonstrate fiscal restraint, but this is a necessary step that will help to ensure Alberta maintains a healthy and prosperous economy.

Mr. Speaker, there are a few elements of this bill that I would like to comment on today. I'd first like to commend the hon. Premier, the Deputy Premier, and the rest of our government for their commitment to an improved budgeting process. I believe that implementing a results-based budgeting framework is the right choice for Alberta. We live in a dynamic world, and it is imperative that our government build flexibility into our system to deal with the changes we face. By establishing a three-year review cycle for all government spending, we will continue to ensure that Albertans' tax dollars are being used efficiently and effectively.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to applaud our government for devising a budgeting strategy that holds the opinions of Albertans at its core. I know that under our new leadership we will continue

to move in the right direction, in the direction Albertans want our province to go.

5:20

I'm also pleased to see that all agencies, boards, and commissions will be reviewed under the three-year process set out in Bill 1. In particular, I'm very happy to know that the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission will see regular reviews. Since 1987 Albertans have benefited from the revenue of Alberta's gaming industry through the Alberta lottery fund, but it appears to me that some of these revenues come from Albertans who cannot afford to gamble away their hard-earned dollars, so I'm hopeful that Bill 1 will lead to frequent reviews of Alberta's gaming revenues and practices, which could help us to discover improved ways of maintaining the important funding coming from Alberta's gaming industry while mitigating the social costs associated with gambling addiction.

Mr. Speaker, as the first province to pay off our accumulated debt and to establish such savings tools as the heritage savings trust fund and the sustainability fund, Alberta has become known for our economic leadership. Bill 1 will further establish Alberta as a leader by bringing new fiscal discipline to government as we rapidly approach a return to surplus budgets. Our tremendous economic performance in conjunction with this improved budgeting process will open up a number of opportunities in our province. For example, it's my sincere hope that through stronger fiscal planning we will be able to once again increase our rate of savings in the heritage fund.

Mr. Speaker, 30 years ago this fund was designed to be an endowment for future generations to help diversify our economy, to improve Albertans' quality of life, and lastly, as a rainy-day fund. I believe it is important that we review these objectives to determine if they are still relevant today. As such, I've been pleased to hear the hon. Premier speak more and more about the heritage fund lately, and I eagerly await the affirmation of a renewed long-term vision for the fund that will serve Albertans into the distant future. Bill 1 will not only create opportunities to renew and revitalize Alberta's savings, but by putting our budgeting process on a three-year cycle, it will also set the stage for our government to provide the much-anticipated stable long-term funding for essential services such as health care and education.

Furthermore, by improving our fiscal position, Bill 1 will enable Alberta to continue diversifying our economy, which will allow us to reduce over time our reliance on nonrenewable resources. The improved efficiency we will achieve through this bill will permit increasing investment in valuable industries such as renewable fuels, carbon capture and storage, and health and bioindustry innovations. Overall, it is clear that Bill 1 holds great potential, and if we harness the benefits of this new budgeting process effectively, Bill 1 will create a great deal of opportunity in the province of Alberta.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 1 is a step in the right direction for our province. I know that the savings we will accrue by using a results-based budgeting process will go a long way in further improving Alberta's position. Our province is already in an enviable social and economic position in Canada and, in fact, in North America and internationally. By passing Bill 1, we will be painting an even brighter future for our province.

For all of those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in favour of this legislation, and I encourage everyone in this Assembly to do the same. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to join in?

Seeing none, the chair shall call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

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

lateness of the hour today I would move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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