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The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

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Issue 9

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 27th Legislature

Fifth Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 22, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't often have visitors sitting in your gallery, but today I am particularly pleased to introduce to you and through you a man familiar to many of us, the former Edmonton-Calder MLA and current Member of Parliament for the Edmonton-St. Albert riding, Mr. Brent Rathgeber. Brent and I have known each other for a long time. He was instrumental in my decision to run in 2008, and he holds, in my mind, one of the greatest bits of folk wisdom I have ever heard. As tough as it is to make a law, it is even tougher to unmake one. But the gun registry as we know it is history. Thank you, Brent, I would ask you to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a distinct pleasure of mine to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the Hon. June Draude, Saskatchewan's Minister of Social Services. Minister Draude was a founding member of the Saskatchewan Party in 1997 and has served as a minister since 2007. Like me, she grew up on the farm and continues to have strong roots and ties to rural communities. The minister is taking some time here in Alberta to learn more about our 10-year plan to end homelessness and the housing first model, but we managed to discuss much more than that. I look forward to many years of working with the minister as we build great partnerships. She met with Susan McGee of Homeward Trust this morning and toured some housing projects here in Edmonton.

Today I had the pleasure of joining Minister Draude for lunch along with the president of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, Mr. Don Allen, and her assistant, Mr. Theo Bryson. All of us agreed that the future of Alberta and Saskatchewan and particularly the New West Partnership working together are incredible. I'd ask all three of them to please rise – they're seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker – to receive the traditional warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today.

An Hon. Member: It's all in Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. It is indeed, hon. member.

I'd like to introduce to you, first of all, Mr. Speaker, three of the founding members of the Bust a Move breast cancer fundraiser group, and I'll be talking more about this group in a moment in a member's statement. First is my eldest sister and undoubtedly my strongest supporter, my sister Susan Norum; her daughter, my niece, Melissa Norum; and the president of Airco air charters, Mrs. Mary Anne Stanway. Now, my wife, Barb, who is actually the one who founded this, couldn't be here because, thanks to a robust Alberta economy, she's out, actually, closing a house deal. I would like them all now to please rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is a school group near and dear to my heart as well as to my home in Kensington, the class from Kensington elementary school in the Edmonton-Calder constituency. We have with us today 27 students and teacher Miss Jaelene McEwen and student teacher – I think I've got that right, Stephanie – Miss Stephanie Gruber. If you could all rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly. What a great-looking group.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two classes from Riverview visiting today, so it's a double-the-pleasure kind of day for me. The first is a class from St. Martin Catholic school, which is a wonderful, wonderful school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Harasymiw, who invites me out year after year to speak to the grade 6s about government and always makes sure that her students are incredibly well prepared. She's one of the really wonderful teachers in Alberta's school system. I'd ask St. Martin to rise and receive the warm welcome of all MLAs.

The second class is another great school from my constituency. It's a school that has produced a number of MLAs over the years, Mr. Speaker, including the Member for Edmonton-Centre, the former Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and me. You know, anything can happen. This school is called McKernan elementary school. There is a large group here, actually, 47. There are teachers Miss Sackey, Ms Kinjo, and Miss Lassouani – sorry about the pronunciation – and the parents are Ms Bergman and Mr. Ley. I would venture to guess that there might be a future MLA among this class as well. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two fine groups today to introduce to you and through you. I am pleased to introduce to you very special guests who are in attendance today to witness the tabling of Bill 4, the St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act. These groups worked collaboratively to respond to an issue in their school jurisdiction, and I am proud to introduce legislation later on today, as you already know. We have Sturgeon school division chair Terry Jewell, vice-chair Tracy Nowak, and superintendent Michèle Dick as well from the greater St. Albert Catholic regional division, chair Lauri-Ann Turnbull, trustee Dave Caron, and superintendent David Keohane. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, a very enthusiastic team of students that I met earlier today: they are known as the robotics team from l'école Maurice-Lavallée school here in Edmonton. I met with them earlier. They are travelling to St. Louis, Missouri, in April to compete in the FIRST Tech Challenge World Championship, building robots. This group is one of two teams representing

Canada in that particular competition. This is an international competition where students design and build robots that must perform tasks for points. They are either self-controlled or they are controlled by students who are operating them. Simply phenomenal.

Today from that school we have 11 grade 10 students, and they are Yves Dempsey, Emanuelle Dubbeldam, Sean Fisher, Cameron French, James Hryniw, Alain Letourneau, Nathan Liebrecht, Yannick Plamondon, René Yvan Lucas, Marcel Schneider, Nicholas Westbury, and they are accompanied by adult members Michel Gariépy, teacher; Vlad Pasek, principal; and Philippe Manseau, adult mentor. I would ask them all to rise, and I thank you for representing Alberta and Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two very special ladies from my constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul. They are Mrs. Eveline Luce and Mrs. Kathy Kutryk. Eveline and Kathy both provide exceptional support to me and the people of Lac La Biche-St. Paul. Eveline is my constituency assistant, and Kathy provides support to her when needed. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I received word today that some good Albertans are here in the Assembly, and I'd like to introduce them to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. They are Arlin Biffert, who is a real advocate for change in the relationship between aboriginal communities, the province, and the federal government, and with him today, I hope in one of the galleries, are Tammy L. Rain-Dellaire and Darlene Rain. They are both advocates for change for treatment of aboriginal children in child welfare. If they're joining us in either of the public galleries, I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome. There they are. Thank you very much.

1:40

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Satnam Singh Khalon, visiting us from the beautiful province of Punjab, visiting us for the first time. Joining him today are three very good friends and supporters: Gurbhalinder Singh Sandhu, editor for *Des Pardes Times*, as well as Satwinder Singh Khalon and Jaswinder Singh Dhillon, both local businessmen. I ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? Then please join with me in congratulating the hon. Minister of Transportation, who is today celebrating his arrival into the world many years ago.

Members' Statements

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

Bust a Move Breast Health Awareness Campaign

Mr. Elniski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It feels like I got a hat trick today.

As I indicated in my introduction, I'm here today to talk about the Alberta Cancer Foundation's latest fundraising event and breast health awareness campaign called Bust a Move. A thousand women from across the city are going to spend March 24 at the AgriCom doing six hours of cardio exercise to raise funds for breast cancer research and breast health awareness. While in the past we have mildly poked fun at the things we do for prostate cancer fundraising, every person here knows someone who has been stricken or otherwise affected by some form of the disease.

This is the inaugural year for Bust a Move's event, and some interesting people have signed on. Richard Simmons of *Sweatin' to the Oldies* fame will be there to offer his encouragement to the participants during the last half-hour of their six-hour exercise marathon. Yes, Mr. Speaker, six hours of cardio is being performed by teams with such creative names as the TaTas, the Breast Friends, and – I could not make this up, I swear – Handfuls of Happiness.

Getting involved is easy. Register, donate money, and take the pledge.

- I will dance, sing, and laugh my way to better health.
- I will celebrate the choices I make to stay healthy . . .
- I will not let the fear of silliness or sweat stand in the way of healthier breasts for all of womankind.

Then after agreeing to all of this, they do six hours of exercise, including something called zumba.

Mr. Speaker, it's serious business. One in eight women will be affected by breast cancer, and this inaugural year of Bust a Move needs to be a success. Thank you very much to my wife, Barb, my niece Melissa, Rita, Mary Anne, Sue, and Merie for entering the team Breast Friends. So far they're the third-highest grossing team, having raised \$2,080, on the way to \$5,000. It's a lofty target, but if you're going to have a goal, you may as well aim high.

Thank you.

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

Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Welcome to Alberta, a First World province with Third World politics. My next remarks are all direct quotes from the just-released Health Quality Council report on physician intimidation.

More than half of physicians who responded . . . feel their ability to advocate had been limited in the past year . . . Twenty per cent of physicians who advocated experienced "active harmful obstruction."

Four hundred and seventy-eight respondents made comments such as:

- Advised to "not continue speaking"; "labelled negative, misinformed, or speaking out of turn."
- Several were threatened with loss of privileges, having their mental competency questioned, and being "fired" for advocating.
- "Intimidation is real but subtle"; "It's extremely difficult to advocate due to undertones of intimidation and being told to stop being so outspoken."
- "No matter what anyone says, a culture of fear, intimidation, apathy, elitism, inequality, and manipulation exists and has existed for some time."
- "Obvious systemic harassment and intimidation that [affects negatively] on patient safety."

It goes on.

Many interviewees identified, through their own personal experiences or experiences of others, disturbing situations where leaders . . . had attempted to 'muzzle' or intimidate physicians to prevent or cut short their advocacy. In some cases,

this was attributed to leaders being ‘directed’ from external sources, such as politicians [in] the government, to stop the advocacy . . .

These experiences caused significant stress for some of the individuals involved and, in some instances, were life-altering, resulting in career changes or a move out of the province. These situations were seen to have sent a clear message that “if you speak up, this is what can happen to you.”

Premier, call the public inquiry on physician intimidation and get to the bottom of this outrage. Your government’s treatment of our health professionals borders on criminal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Fallen Four Memorial

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 3 marks seven years since four brave young RCMP officers full of promise and hope were shot and killed near Mayerthorpe in the Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency. It was a terrible tragedy that took the lives of constables Peter Schiemann, Leo Johnston, Anthony Gordon, and Brock Myrol.

The volunteer, nonprofit Fallen Four Memorial Society in Mayerthorpe was established and determined that these communities will neither be defined nor defeated by the killings and with determination built a six-acre Fallen Four Memorial Park, which is a fitting tribute to these fallen heroes. Every year they organize a memorial candlelight ceremony around four lifelike bronze statues of Anthony, Leo, Peter, and Brock and a centre obelisk to honour all uniformed police officers, peace officers, soldiers, sheriffs, and first responders who have died in the line of duty across Canada.

On behalf of my neighbours in the Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency I ask that you join them either in thought or in person at the Fallen Four Memorial Park in Mayerthorpe at 7 p.m. on March 3, 2012. Mr. Speaker, joining this proud community to light a candle gives everyone a moment to reflect and remember with dignity those who serve and protect.

To the families of Peter, Brock, Anthony, and Leo, and to all of those who have lost a loved one who wears a uniform, I assure you that the brave are never forgotten.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [applause]

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

Problem Gambling

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government owns or leases over 13,000 slot machines and up to 6,000 VLTs. It is estimated that they will generate for the province \$1.3 billion next year.

A report from last year indicates that a small percentage of people currently account for the bulk of reported Alberta gaming expenditure. In fact, 75 per cent of reported gaming expenditure comes from roughly 6 per cent of the population. Yesterday the Minister of Finance rejected the research, which states that the proportion of game-specific expenditure accounted for by problem gamblers is 77 per cent for VLTs and 72 per cent for slot machines.

What happens when problem gamblers seek help in our province? Over 72,000 problem gamblers were recently identified; 19,000 wanted help; 8,000 sought help; less than 1,900 received treatment for their gaming problems or addictions from AADAC. Very little money is spent for treatment of problem gambling.

Alberta’s per capita expenditures on problem gambling lag far behind those of other provinces.

This government is very pleased to collect all of the profits from VLTs and slot machines but pretends that problem gambling is not a big issue. We can do better. We certainly must try. First, this government must recognize that we have problems and that they have to be corrected. We must dedicate more of the gambling revenue collected to help those with a gambling habit that is out of control.

We also need to change this government’s shady accounting system, which inflates the revenue figures for VLTs and slot machines. The government is taking a larger percentage of cash played by Albertans in VLTs and slot machines as revenue than it claims.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Health Quality Council Review Report

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With today’s report the Health Quality Council has walked right up to the Premier and pinned a gold star on her lapel and completely sidestepped the most serious claims that doctors made about patient safety. What else but a whitewash can we expect from a PC-appointed group just weeks before the Premier calls an election?

1:50

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the report, that we just received today, I think from what I’ve seen so far is a very good review of the state of health care at the moment in the province. It’s quite interesting to me that depending on what an hon. member’s perspective may be, it may be considered to be praising the health care system or perhaps criticizing it.

The point is that having just received this report, as we have said, we are looking forward to reviewing it fully, and the minister of health will respond in due time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the report doesn’t change the facts I know of, that we know doctors are willing to tell under the right circumstances, will the Premier ignore the whitewash and call a proper inquiry that compels doctors to testify and protects them at the same time?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, my recollection of my review of the report so far is that, in fact, one of the things that the Health Quality Council did with respect to doctors that wanted to come forward was to offer them blanket immunity with respect to information that they might provide. My understanding as I go through this is that the Health Quality Council has made some recommendations with respect to whether or not some issues need to be pursued and have in many cases said that they don’t.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the report confirms that many, many aspects of the health care system are very sick – and the government has known about this for years – when will the Premier commit to doing the single most important thing so that she can fix it, and that’s double home-care spending to get

seniors out of acute-care beds? Premier, when will you fix the system?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have a budget before the House right now that's going to do exactly that. We've been talking about doing that, we'll continue to do that, and we will continue to improve the health care system.

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

Comments at Airdrie Council Meeting

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A news release issued by Airdrie Alderman Allan Hunter, a former lifetime PC supporter, outlines his futile quest for an apology from the Finance minister for his rude and offensive behaviour during this government's infamous pre-election cabinet listening tour. During this so-called listening tour Mr. Hunter expressed his concerns about the government's land-use bills, but instead of listening, the Finance minister started yelling profanities at Mr. Hunter. To the Premier. For the second time in two weeks Albertans are talking about the PC government bullying municipal officials. When will this stop?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, there were very good discussions in January with respect to a number of elected officials and issues across the province. I do understand that there was a conversation that took place. There were a number of people who witnessed that conversation. A frank exchange of views is just fine. It's important discussion. It's important to ensure that we're airing views, and we have nothing else to say on the matter.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's hard to believe there could have been a good discussion when a minister is yelling profanities and another one is boycotting meetings.

Given that there is nothing the Premier can say about this event that a decent Albertan would believe and trust, why won't the Premier own up to it and say that she and her government are sorry for their government's insufferable arrogance and mistreatment of elected officials in Alberta?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, allegations as to whether comments were or weren't made that are entirely unfounded: we're not going to respond any further to that.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, leadership is about taking personal responsibility. Given that the Premier personally shrugged responsibility and lacked leadership in her apology to AUMA last week, will the Premier find the courage this week to order her Minister of Finance to say to Alderman Hunter that he's sorry so that Alderman Hunter can retire gracefully from public service?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has responded as he chooses to respond, and I completely respect his position.

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

Electricity Prices

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday this Premier blamed consumers, hard-working Albertans, for not locking themselves into complicated long-term electrical contracts knowing full well that the regulated rate option was never intended to be a stable option for the lowest prices. Why would this government

make the default option the one that forces Albertans to pay higher prices? Why, Premier?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, at this point in time we know that the prices people are paying for electricity are slightly higher, but we also know that in the past two years those prices have been significantly lower than the national average. What we will say is that it's important for us to ensure that we are protecting consumers from the ups and downs of these variations, and as part of what I said yesterday, the work that we will do in response to some of the policy documents that are currently in the public domain is to have a comprehensive approach. I've directed the Minister of Energy to take a look at these issues, and we will respond in due time.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Premier has checked her electricity bills lately in saying slightly higher.

Given that the PC government keeps repeating that Albertans have options, something consumers in other provinces don't have, options to pay a heck of a lot more, what good is it to have all of these options if they don't include the option of actually paying an affordable price for electricity so that we can heat our homes?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to relay to you a call I had from a senior when I was in my office last Friday. She wanted to know if I had the fixed-rate contract. I said that I did, and she thanked me very much. She said it was a little confusing, but if I had one, it gave her the confidence to go out and do it.

I'd like to ask this MLA and all the people over there: when will you stop trying to scare your constituents and start helping them get the 8-cent rate?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question was to the Premier, not to the wannabe Premier.

Given that the fact is that this PC government made the system so complicated that Albertans need an economist, a lawyer, and a fortune teller to figure it out, why does the Premier refuse to simplify the system for our seniors, for our working families, for these children's parents, a system that reeks of flim-flammy, jiggery-pokery, and corporate profiteering? Why, Premier?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, once again I'm happy to inform the members and inform all Albertans that there are 11 different companies with programs out there. I am on a program. I'm happy to repeat it: 8 cents a kilowatt hour guaranteed for the next five years, and I can get out of that contract with one month's notice.

Why don't you start helping people instead of trying to scare them for short-term advantage?

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

Alleged Intimidation of Physicians

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyday Albertans, our families and seniors, have watched their health care system deteriorate for the past several years at the hands of this government. Today's scathing Health Quality Council report confirms what we've known for years: physicians have been muzzled and intimidated against advocating for their patients. More than half of the doctors surveyed said that advocacy is limited, and 1 in 5 reported active, harmful obstruction of patient advocacy. Will the Premier, then, finally do the right thing and fulfill her promise and call an independent . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier. [interjection] The hon. the Premier, please.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, what we have been saying in this House and the legislation that we passed in the fall will do exactly that.

Mrs. Forsyth: You're a lawyer. You know better than that.

Given that today's report from the Health Quality Council confirms that there have been several instances of doctor intimidation and given that we know there are many more physicians out there who won't give their testimony unless they are given the full protection of a judge and given that you yourself, Premier, said in June that only an inquiry with subpoena powers can give us the real answers, when will you admit that your inquiry legislation is nothing but bad medicine and finally call a judicial . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as we've said, the government has just received the report. We are going to take the time over the next few days to review the recommendations in detail, and those recommendations will greatly inform the development of terms of reference for the inquiry that has been promised by the Premier.

I might also say to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, that this report makes several recommendations about things that can also be done outside of an inquiry process to improve the relationship and advocacy opportunities for physicians and other health providers. We're committed to that. We'll continue to work with the AMA to make sure that happens.

2:00

Mrs. Forsyth: That's a cop-out, Minister. The health professionals in this province do not trust you.

Given that Albertans have a right to know the full nature of this government's record on health care and given that this Premier has known since June that with the allegations of a culture of intimidation there is a reason for a full judicial inquiry, why, Mrs. Premier, have you sat on your hands for the past four and a half months with broken promise after broken promise while Albertans have been waiting for an answer? Call the full judicial inquiry today.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times we have to repeat the same answer in this House over and over. The government is committed to calling the inquiry. We will take the opportunity to review the recommendations in the report to inform the terms of reference.

If the opposition wants to dismiss the contents of the report, 10 months of work and 21 recommendations, and think that they have the answers, they're welcome to express those to Albertans. This process is not about individual members of this House, the government, or the opposition. This is about Albertans and their experience in our health care system and how we will work to improve that.

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

Health Quality Council Review Report (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year after being elected, this government broke the Conservative election promise to build

more long-term care beds and then threw our health care system into chaos with dramatic reorganization. Now, given the clear connection between these actions and today's documented crisis in our emergency rooms and around physician intimidation will the Premier take a modicum of responsibility and ask for the resignation of the Member for Calgary-West?

Ms Redford: No.

Ms Notley: Hardly a surprise, given their record so far.

Given that the Health Quality Council report documented that half of the physicians felt constrained in their ability to advocate for patients and a third felt that they had been subjected to retribution that was related to political interference, will the Premier call a public inquiry that specifically examines political interference in and around intimidation of the operation of our health care system?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, some of the recommendations in this report are quite interesting. In fact, one of the recommendations in this report is that, let me see – the Health Quality Council is further recommending that the time and money that would be needed for a public inquiry into intimidation and advocacy should instead be devoted to other things. However, this government passed legislation in the fall that fully committed to a judge-led inquiry once the report was released. We said we would consider the report, establish terms of reference, call the inquiry, and we will.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hate to break it to you, but no one trusts this government on any of these issues anymore.

Now, given that the report outlines that the ER crisis is a result of the long-term-care bed failure and given that the report identifies reorganization with no rationale as a huge problem, an explanation for all of the problems, will the Premier at the very least in her next press conference look Albertans in the eye through the camera and apologize to them for the outrageous record of this government in health care over the last three years?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to expanding long-term-care beds in this province, and we will. The other thing that we have said is that there will be no further reorganizations of the health care system. We have a health care system that needs to provide public health care to Albertans. We have a minister in charge of this department who works with Alberta Health Services to do just that, and we'll continue to do that.

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

Health Services Labour Negotiations

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Not until 800 of them took to the picket lines last week did Alberta Health Services finally agree to go to binding arbitration to settle its contract dispute with this province's hard-working hospital support staff. Meanwhile AHS's contract with Alberta's licensed practical nurses and nursing aides is up at the end of the month. To the minister of health, who's not having a good day: will the LPNs and nursing aides also have to walk off the job to get this government to bargain in good faith?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, I am having a very good day, thank you very much.

What I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the hon. member's question is that, yes, there are a number of labour organizations in the province at the moment that are in negotiations

with government or with arms of government such as Alberta Health Services. We will continue to negotiate fairly and openly. We all want to see these issues resolved through the process of negotiation, but we will not dictate to the people doing the negotiation nor will we debate on the floor of this House the terms of those agreements.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'd very interested in hearing how the minister is having such a good day when we have labour negotiations in such disarray.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the labour negotiations process includes opportunities for negotiation, obviously. It also includes provisions for when negotiations fail. The particular dispute to which the hon. member refers is now in a process called mediation/arbitration. It's being led by a highly respected mediator in Alberta. The terms of the process were defined by the parties involved in the agreement, and I think Albertans and all members of this House should have every confidence that that process will conclude fairly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, back to the same minister. I'd be interested in knowing how it is in good faith or good management to oppose the request for an arbitrator to settle the lengthy contract dispute with the province's physicians.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea about the issue the hon. member is referring to. We are in active negotiations with the Alberta Medical Association at present. I'm not going to disclose the details of those discussions. I will tell you that they are productive, that they are positive, that the current president of the AMA is a family physician and is uniquely positioned to understand one of this government's top priorities in health care, access to family physicians and other primary health care providers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

European Union Fuel Quality Directive

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow members of the European Union are scheduled to vote on the proposed fuel quality directive that discriminates against Alberta oil. Many of my constituents are very much reliant on the energy sector. To the Premier: can I honestly tell my constituents and can we tell all Albertans that we've done everything possible to see that our oil is not unfairly labelled?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the first thing we're going to do and have been doing in Europe for the past year through many visits by ministers of energy and our minister of international relations as well as our office in London and working with the federal government is to make sure that people know the truth about oil sands product.

We believe that the FQD does unfairly discriminate against our product as a source. We've made that case. We don't know what the result of the vote will be tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. We've advocated; we will continue to advocate regardless of the outcome.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the Minister of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Rela-

tions: we've got two international offices in Europe, yet it doesn't seem like we can get our message across. Are these offices really effective?

Mr. Dallas: Yes, they are, Mr. Speaker. Our Alberta United Kingdom office, led by Jeff Sundquist, has been spearheading our efforts to provide the European Union with facts – facts – about Alberta's responsible development.

We've been meeting with Members of Parliament, government officials, industry, and influencers right across Europe. Albertans can feel very confident that we are doing everything that we can in this matter, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister. The federal government has indicated it may challenge the FQD to the World Trade Organization if it is passed tomorrow. What is Alberta's position on this?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, we work closely with the federal government on matters relating to the oil sands, and certainly this is no exception. I can't speculate on which way the decision will go; however, I can say that we will take the appropriate action necessary to protect the interests of Albertans and all Canadians. Our oil sands hold economic significance not only for our province but right across this country, and we'll take all of the steps necessary to defend them on the international stage.

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

Diagnostic Billing Code for Sexual Orientation

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In December of 2010 the minister of health agreed with my constituent and I that doctors' diagnostic billing codes listing sexual orientation under mental illness was unacceptable, but those billing codes are in use in exactly the same place and say the same things today. All that happened was that the reference to them was removed from public websites and information. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: tell me why those exact same diagnostic billing codes are still in use in this province today, listing sexual orientation counselling under mental illness.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. While I won't have a lot to offer in terms of a detailed answer – and I would be happy to look into it and get back to her – what I can tell the hon. member is that government does not on its own set billing codes. There are a variety of factors that come into play, including the role of our physicians, including research that informs these decisions. However, I do want the hon. member to know that I have a significant degree of sympathy for the concern that she has raised, and I will look into it.

2:10

Ms Blakeman: That's what the last minister said, but we'll give this one a chance.

Even given the laborious process, I'm sure, to work this out with the Alberta Medical Association and other physicians that use the billing codes, shouldn't the government show leadership and do the right thing: change those building codes?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I would like the opportunity to look into this in a bit more detail and get back to the hon. member. There are a number of ways that new billing codes or

amended billing codes can be initiated in the system. It is not a decision that the government makes on its own. Physicians have an opportunity to influence new and modified billing codes, as do other entities. I'd be pleased to look into this process and get back to the hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Well, back to the same minister. What I am seeking here is a commitment to action. Perhaps the minister could comment on whether removing the diagnostic billing codes from public view solved the issue of the government and physicians coding sexual orientation as a mental illness. I don't think it did. It was just hidden. The minister's response?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have any knowledge of how or when the billing codes appear in the public domain and when they don't. What I will tell the hon. member is that I would agree with her that simply changing where the billing codes are publicly available does not address the issue that she has raised. I'd be pleased to look into it.

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

Oil Sands Transportation Coordinating Committee

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oil sands are very important not only to Wood Buffalo but to my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. A day does not go by without somebody bringing transportation issues about highway 63 or highway 55. My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. I understand the oil sands transportation advisory committee met for the first time yesterday in Fort McMurray. Can you help explain to this House how we can ensure that this committee provides real solutions that support oil sands growth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The coordinating committee includes representatives from municipalities, from the industry, and from the province. The discussions that took place yesterday reflected the needs of Albertans in the area. By having these players at the table, priorities that they recommend will reflect the transportation needs of those Albertans in that area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Was anything actually accomplished at this first meeting? Are we actually going to see some changes in our highways up in the north?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the discussions of the first meeting were very productive. They set priorities and reviewed the CRISP report. Also, if I can say, what I understand is that there was unanimous focus that the east corridor would be preferable as far as the transportation corridor or, let's say, a relief route, a multipurpose corridor. They also discussed ways to fund these projects. It's definitely off to a good start.

Funding for Private Schools

Mr. Hehr: Yesterday we learned that although the minister will make public school boards disclose financial information online for

public scrutiny, he will not impose the same principles of openness and transparency on private schools that receive taxpayer dollars. To the Minister of Education: where will the information regarding private schools be available for the public to see online? Will this be in the same format required for our public school boards?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, either this member did not listen to my answer yesterday or he is purposefully changing my answer for the purposes of this forum. I have been very clear that I will have the same expectations for private school boards as I have for public school boards relevant to the portion of dollars that is appropriated to private schools from the public purse, being from the government of Alberta.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's call a spade a spade here. All the money that goes to these private schools is put into a pot, and then they provide their services from that. I think the public has a right to know what services are being provided in these private schools, and that should be available online.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this member wants a very simple answer to a very simple question, but the answer, unfortunately, is more complex. Private schools are funded up to 70 per cent by the government of Alberta, and the remainder of the funding is money raised by parents and by those who support the school. They have to be accountable for the 70 per cent that they receive from the government of Alberta, but the 30 per cent that they raise within their own means by way of tuition or donations is something that they have to be accountable for to the donors or whoever supplies them with that 30 per cent.

Mr. Hehr: The hon. minister knows full well that the 70 per cent of the money that he receives from taxpayers goes into a big pot of money, and they provide services from that pot. We want to see what that 70 per cent is augmenting for the services that are provided at the school. I think the public has a right to know what is going on in our private schools. Will that be online?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the reason we pride ourselves in this province on having one of the best education systems in the world is because of the choice. This member and, frankly, the Liberal opposition have been harping for months already to close down or get rid of private schools. This government will not do that because they provide a viable option to parents, and obviously parents choose to exercise it because they're sending their kids to public schools, which makes our private schools and public schools and charter schools and home-schooling that much more viable.

Home-schooling

Ms DeLong: A number of my constituents currently choose to home-school their children and provide them with the upbringing that they support as a family. Along this same vein the Minister of Education just a few moments ago even suggested that one of the greatest strengths of Alberta's education system is choice of a variety of educational programs. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Can the minister assure me and these parents that this government continues to support the choice of home-schooling within our education system?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer would be yes. This government is committed to choice, and that is why in this province we have Catholic education and nondenominational

education, private education, home-schooling, charter schooling, and the list goes on and on. Whenever bona fide home-schooling takes place, we are very supportive of that because it has proven itself, again, to be a viable choice for parents who choose to take that option. This government has historically been supportive of it, and there is no reason to believe that anything in that realm will change.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since you're such a strong proponent of choice, how are you ensuring that all home educators in this province will continue to be able to determine what their children learn?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, home-schoolers are no different from any other parent in the system. Parents under the current legislation, being the School Act, and the proposed legislation on the floor of the Legislature will always have the choice of opting out of certain aspects of programs or education that they feel are not appropriate for their own child.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The home-schooling parents that contacted me are highly invested and proud of the exceptional educational standards that their children are attaining. But what about others where home-schooling is maybe just a default decision? What minimum accountability provisions are included for educational programs in this province?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, by and large home-schooling has worked quite fine for children, and that is because we have committed parents not only in the home-schooling community but, frankly, in the entire Alberta education community. That is another pillar that makes our education so strong. We will be looking at situations where, perhaps, this home-schooling clause is utilized for purposes other than home-schooling, which perhaps results in the education being inadequate, but that does not pertain to traditional home-schooling families that choose to educate their children at home.

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

Long-term and Continuing Care Beds

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Health Quality Council report identifies that at the heart of this government's failure to address ER wait times is its inability to create adequate numbers of long-term care and continuing care spaces in the community, spaces that people need to be able to be moved out from the hospital into the community. Given that will the Minister of Seniors explain to Albertans why, after three years of being asked, his ministry is unable to report on the number of continuing care spaces created by category of care level offered?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you for that question. Mr. Speaker, last night in estimates I attempted, attempted poorly, to explain the situation. There has not been a decrease in long-term care facilities or beds in this province. There's been a slight increase, probably not enough, but there's been a slight increase. I explained last night that I will definitely have a full report back to the chairman for everybody to review, class by class, number by number, and that will be given next week.

2:20

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that an SL 1 unit presumes that a senior lives independently, requires no care of any kind, and lives in a unit that requires no wheelchair and an SL 4 unit presumes the senior has complex medical needs that may require built-in mechanical lifts, tube-feeding capacity, and 24-hour care, will the minister admit that his ministry's and his government's inability to report on the number of units by type throughout the province, given what we've just had described by the Health Quality Council, is nothing short of negligent?

Mr. VanderBurg: Again, Mr. Speaker, as I explained to this member last night, one of the issues that I found frustrating in the past four months is the designation that we have for our different types of seniors' facilities. To me it would be simple to have a classification 1, 2, 3, light, medium, heavy. These classifications that we've got have to be straightened out, and it's a commitment that I've made to all of you that we will over the next 12 months have a review of those classifications.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that you can't ask somebody to move out of an acute-care bed until you can describe the type of bed you're asking them to move into and given that over half a billion dollars of taxpayers' money has been spent in the last four years on these so-called continuing care spaces, why does the minister of health, perhaps, not believe that Albertans have a right to know exactly what kind of continuing care units their tax dollars have been building over the last four years?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans have a right to is to know that the government will continue to fund affordable living spaces for them that provide a level of health care that will meet their needs. I wholeheartedly agree that we need a range of spaces available that provide very light care to very heavy care, including palliative care, I might say, for people who are in need of that type of service. But what we will not do is return to the continuing care model of the 1970s, where we typed people by beds instead of by their health care needs.

Bullying in Private Schools

Mr. Hehr: This government is taking a hard line against bullying in public schools, a move that I applaud, but they are intentionally excluding children who attend private schools from protection against bullying. Time after time this government bends the rules so that private institutions can have their own way. To the Minister of Education: can the minister agree that the same set of rules respecting bullying policies should apply to both public school boards and publicly funded private schools?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I think I just said in one of my recent answers that this member will find any angle he possibly can to shut down private schools in Alberta. I would strongly encourage this man to just stand up and say, "Please get rid of private schools in Alberta" because this is where it's heading.

To answer your question, I expect any and all learning institutions in Alberta to provide a nurturing, welcoming, and respectful environment.

Mr. Hehr: Please, Mr. Education Minister, stop publicly funding private schools.

Nevertheless, if this government is so committed to protecting kids in Alberta, why won't private schools be required to provide the same protection against bullying as is required in our public schools?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Sikh community in Alberta, for example, is very supportive of private schools, so I'm wondering if he is speaking on behalf of his entire Liberal caucus. Having said that, I will tell you that my answer is clear and simple. I expect any and all learning institutions in the province of Alberta, be they private or public, to provide a nurturing, welcoming, and respectful environment not only for students but also for staff.

Mr. Hehr: I will ask the minister if he finds it good practice to have one standard for one school jurisdiction and another standard for other publicly funded school systems.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times and how differently I can say that. I expect the same standard of respect and a welcoming and nurturing environment to occur in all learning institutions. Whether children are attending a private school or a public school, there is no difference. As a matter of fact, we will have legislation that will be speaking to bullying, and I'm glad that the member is supporting it.

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

Supply of Skilled Tradespeople

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economic growth is in danger of being stunted by a drastic shortage of skilled workers. One forecast suggests that our province will be short 40,000 tradespeople in the construction sector alone by the end of this decade. The numbers vary from forecast to forecast, but the real question is: what is Alberta doing to try and reverse this trend? My questions are all to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is your department doing to open up training spaces to try and make up the difference?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've heard, this is a significant issue across the province. This government is committed to training and educating our future workforce. To that end we've improved the apprenticeship ratios across the province and we've maintained seats through some very difficult financial times in the apprenticeships. Our partnership with our employers is important. It's hard to apprentice if you don't have a job, so we're asking our employers to please step up and hire an apprentice so that they can begin that very necessary training.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the same minister. Alberta has over 60 trades in occupation, yet only four are available online. Why aren't all trades available via e-learning?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is something fairly new. We have four of our most sought-after trades online, and we're working as we speak to look for opportunities to allow training online. The reason for this is so that tradesmen can stay at home during their education process or stay in their places of employment to provide support to their employers, to ultimately get that training online and not have to leave home and leave their families. So we're going to move and continue to move more of our training online as it's appropriate.

Mr. Johnston: My final question to the same minister. Foreign workers represent another potential solution to the labour

shortage, but are Alberta's credentialing and validation requirements strong enough to make sure that our province gets the workers that we need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you. We're very fortunate that each and every year people move to Alberta, 80,000 or 90,000 last year from across Canada and around the world. Mr. Speaker, they don't just bring their families; they bring their skills and their trades, so we must work closely with them.

We currently have 22 practical exams in 15 trades. We're working on practical assessments to ensure that our tradesmen are capable of doing the job. We don't just want them to be able to do their job on paper; they have to be able to do it on the job site.

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

Health Quality Council Review Report (continued)

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Cowell from the Health Quality Council said today that Albertans should not – and I repeat: should not – be satisfied with its findings. Albertans want to know what the heck is going on within their health care system. Will this minister call a public inquiry within the next week, well before we go to a provincial election?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what specific comment the hon. member is attempting to attribute to Dr. Cowell. What I can say is what the Premier of this province has said repeatedly and I have also echoed in this House. This government is committed to a fully independent inquiry. We will take the necessary time to review this report and its detailed recommendations, that will inform the terms of reference for the inquiry, and we'll have more to say about this in the coming days.

Mr. Boutilier: Given, Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council's indictment of this government and this minister's watch not only as the minister of health but also as the junior minister of health will he call a public inquiry within the next seven days?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware of no personal indictment directed either at me or at any other member of this House, so I'd be very interested to know where the hon. member gets substantiation for that statement.

What I will say, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to say is that our commitment to a fully independent inquiry continues. What we will not do is play politics with this, and we will not schedule inquiries in order to suit the political timetables of other caucuses in this House.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, given that this is nothing but politics and given that the government appointed the very superboard that is under your watch with Alberta Health Services, will you now call a public inquiry within seven days so that Albertans can get to the bottom of what is going on within their hospitals? Or are you trying to hide something before an election?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is welcome to his fixation on political cycles and his own political timing. If the hon. member has somehow been able to read through, analyze, and reach a determination and concrete opinion on a 420-page report in a little more than a couple of hours, then I'm certainly amazed at his abilities.

We are committed to the process of the inquiry. We will make an informed decision about appropriate terms of reference, and we will bring them forward to Albertans.

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

2:30 Online Camping Reservation System

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's parks and recreation areas are world renowned for their beauty, their serenity, and their exquisite amenities. They're truly marvellous, and that's largely thanks to the very dedicated parks personnel who care for them and for our visitors on a regular basis. Now, many of my own constituents are very excited by the prospect of the upcoming camping season, which is just around the corner, but they've experienced some difficulties with the online booking process. My questions are to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Mr. Minister, can you please explain to my constituents why so many of them were left on hold for over half an hour and then abruptly cut off, it seems, when they were trying to do some early registrations over the past couple of weeks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. First of all, it is appropriate that I apologize. We have actually been caught by surprise this year at the success of our online booking. To give you an indication of what has happened, last year we took bookings for over 300,000 sites through the season. Yesterday alone we opened up bookings for the May long weekend, and we booked 2,500 spots in one day, half of our available spots, which is 5,000. So I apologize.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, that'll be refreshing news to my constituents, who were just looking for answers. Thank you.

Now, my second question is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Since many campers actually start planning their summer holidays and their work schedules and so on in January and February, I wonder if you could open up the registration process so that they could start booking far earlier than just 90 days ahead of the traditional time that they want booked.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I would love to be able to do that, but that wouldn't meet the needs of all Albertans. Not all Albertans know exactly when their holidays can take place. If we went all the way through the season and opened up those bookings, those Albertans that can at the last minute get away with their families wouldn't have the options. That's why we've chosen this system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Okay. Thank you. Given that several camping areas are contracted out to capable private operators, could you look into whether or not you can institute a policy that would somehow allow these private operators to be around and more available during January and February? Apparently, some of my constituents have tried to book some of these contracted-out sites, but there was no answer and no response. I'm not faulting anyone. I'm just wondering if you could look at your policy to fix it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We can take a look and see if there are other options, but the private operators, in fact, don't start until May 1. It's just not a viable business option for them to be in there at other times. We can take a look as we develop our booking system further. There may be some opportunities for us to be of assistance.

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

Bear Management near Work Camps

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It turns out that this government is the single biggest killer of bears in Alberta. What else could we expect since it is the government that allows increased human-bear interaction by approving camps and oil development in bear habitat. Bottom line: this government could be insisting on rules on where to allow dump and how to discourage bear entry, but it doesn't. My questions are to the Minister of SRD. What is the reason the government is not taking the proactive steps to ensure the best possible protection for the bears at these sites, from location to proper fencing around dumps, to litter pickup, and food storage?

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

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share, actually, the concern of the hon. member. I'm very troubled by the report that I saw in the paper today. As a result, I have already this morning ordered a review of where our rules and regulations around camps stand with best practices in kitchen and camp management and refuse management on-site and how our department stands with monitoring and inspections of those same rules.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I can help the minister with that. Following the Conklin bear kill in 2009, where the fence was in such bad shape that it was easier for the bears to just walk through the fence than go around to the open part of it, an internal e-mail recommended that an SRD committee be set up to minimize bears killed at landfills. What happened to this committee and its risk mitigation for bears?

Mr. Oberle: Well, indeed, Mr. Speaker, we have been doing exactly that work, and we have had some success. Unfortunately, last year because of a combination of environmental factors, weather and berry crop, we had an unbelievable number of bears coming into populated areas. [interjections] They apparently don't want to hear the answer, but just in the northeast of Alberta 530 human-bear interactions. When the fish and wildlife officers attend, they have to act in the interests of human safety. I'm more interested in the protection then, and I'm going to do what I can to resolve this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. I think that the government would agree that much has changed in northern Alberta since 1993. Yes? Yet this department continues to use an old management plan for black bears written in exactly that year. Now, why is that? You're still using a 20-year-old management plan. Why?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I'm reviewing what our department is doing, and I will move to act.

I will say, though, that I'd be deeply, deeply disappointed if we have to establish rules and regulations to get companies to do what I think they should be doing in the interests of the safety of their own workers. I'm very disappointed. At the same time, I will say that many of the companies have been extremely co-operative, working with industrial BearSmart and other training programs, and we are making progress out there.

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

Labour Mobility Barriers

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the agreement on internal trade Manitoba recently challenged Ontario for failing to license certified general accountants from outside of Ontario who served Ontario-based clients. They put roadblocks up against hard-working Albertans and other Canadians. To the Minister of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations: how is your ministry going to ensure that Alberta's goal of free-flowing labour mobility continues for Alberta workers?

Mr. Dallas: Thanks to the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, we were very involved in supporting Manitoba's challenge. Along with B.C. and Saskatchewan we acted as an intervenor and presented a very strong case before the dispute panel on behalf of Alberta's CGAs. This is an example of why I requested additional funding in Budget 2012, to address these kinds of specific issues. We'll continue to break down barriers to labour mobility and trade in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Human Services: why is Alberta in favour of any agreement that could make it easier for our professionals such as accountants to leave this province and go to Ontario?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, labour mobility goes two ways. We support the idea that there should be free trade within the country. We want people to be able to come to Alberta and supply us with services, but we also want Albertans to go elsewhere. It was very important for us. This time it was accountants going to Ontario, but next week it could be workers coming to Alberta. Labour mobility barriers need to be reduced, and Alberta will continue to advocate for this to make it easier for workers to go where the jobs are.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question, again to the Minister of Human Services. I continue to hear concerns about a possible labour shortage. Why are we not doing more to recruit workers from across Canada?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say that these days Alberta is gaining much more than it's losing when it comes to labour mobility. By the end of the third quarter last year almost 24,000 people had moved to Alberta from other parts of Canada. We welcome these people. We need them to help continue to grow our labour force, and quite frankly we're very positive about the fact that Canadians from coast to coast recognize the great opportunities that are here in Alberta. Supporting labour mobility

is a two-way street, and I'm confident that Canadians seeking good opportunities will find that all roads lead back to Alberta. In short, we're going to be short 114,000 workers over the next 10 years.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question-and-response period today. Eighteen members were recognized today. There were 106 questions and responses.

We'll continue the Routine in a few seconds from now.

2:40 Members' Statements (continued)

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

Scotties Tournament of Hearts

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Canada has long distinguished itself as the number one curling nation in the world. Nowhere else is the competition as keen and the path to the top so difficult as it is here in Canada. That's why I'm so excited to welcome the 2012 Scotties Tournament of Hearts to Red Deer.

Curling is one of the major sports in this country, with over 1 million Canadians taking part every year. It's also popular among television viewers, with a reach of more than 3 million for the Scotties championship final.

Major events like the Scotties tournament bring thousands of visitors to our province and help continue to build Alberta's reputation as a world-class tourism and sport destination. Red Deer is the sports capital of Alberta, home to the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame. This is the fifth time that the Canadian women's curling championship has been held there. The 2004 championship in Red Deer had a total attendance of 112,866, and that's second only to Regina in 1998.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to recognize the many volunteers who worked tirelessly to make this event a success, including chairperson Sherri Ryckman; vice chairs Tracy Bush, Lyle Treiber, and Bob More; director of ticket sales, Andy Metzger; director of security, Ivan Simon; Doug Marchment, director of transportation and team services; and all the 520 other volunteers whose hard work and commitment make this event a success.

I would also like to congratulate all the teams for their tremendous achievements, and I wish them all the best of luck. I was pleased to meet all of the teams on Friday night, and I was really pleased to have dinner with Team Canada, represented by curlers from Saskatchewan.

The 2012 Scotties Tournament of Hearts is continuing in Red Deer at the Westerner Park until Sunday, and I encourage everyone to come and enjoy some exciting curling. Mr. Speaker, as the curlers would say, hurry hard.

Thank you.

The Speaker: And no update today on the *Dancing with the Stars* program?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Harley Hotchkiss

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday on behalf of our Minister of Health of Wellness and with our Minister of Advanced Education and Technology I had the great pleasure of attending a wonderful tribute to the late Harley Hotchkiss during which our government joined the University of Calgary in launching the Campus Alberta neuroscience international scholars program. Our \$5 million investment will help to build Alberta's

strengths in neuroscience research and address critical needs of Albertans, leading to improvements in their quality of life and in our health care system.

Mr. Hotchkiss made important contributions to our province and our nation, particularly in his contributions to health research right here in Alberta. As the founding donor of the world-renowned Hotchkiss Brain Institute Harley greatly increased attention to neurological and mental health care issues. He knew that addictions and chronic diseases affect thousands of Albertans and, because of that, our government partnered with him in the international scholars program, which will strengthen neuroscience research and one day lead to new treatments.

The new scholars program will support Alberta universities by helping them to attract the world's best neuroscientists to our province so they can exchange ideas and knowledge with Alberta students and researchers. With this new government support the universities of Calgary, Alberta, and Lethbridge will also jointly host an annual neuroscience symposium to showcase research breakthroughs.

This investment will not only improve our research capability. It will also serve as a lasting, fitting legacy honouring Harley Hotchkiss, a visionary leader with a generous spirit who made outstanding contributions to health research in Alberta. I believe Harley would like me to end this member's statement with: go, Flames, go.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Bill 4

St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I request leave to introduce Bill 4, the St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act.

This legislation ensures that the residents of St. Albert and the Sturgeon Valley have access to the same education opportunities that are offered elsewhere in the province. Let me be clear. There is no question about the quality of education currently being offered in these communities. What we are ensuring is choice and voice for parents, the choice of a public education or a separate, Roman Catholic education and voice in choosing or running for the position of a school board trustee.

Mr. Speaker, Greater St. Albert Catholic schools, St. Albert Protestant schools, and the Sturgeon school division worked hard to identify ways to find the right balance between recognizing community history, supporting choice, honoring students' and parental rights, and collaborating across communities to meet students' needs. The proposed solution reflects much of their work, and I am proud to present it to the House.

With that, I move first reading of Bill 4.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

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

Bill 6

Property Rights Advocate Act

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to

introduce Bill 6, the Property Rights Advocate Act.

Bill 6 will establish the property rights advocate office as part of the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. The proposed legislation supports the government's position that landowners must have recourse to an independent tribunal, the courts, or both for the purpose of determining full and fair compensation for access to their land.

The office will share independent and impartial information about property rights and help people determine the appropriate resolution mechanism, including the courts. This office will be required to table an annual report on the office's business each year in the Legislature to help instill landowner confidence that the government is transparent and accountable for its record on respecting property rights.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 6, the Property Rights Advocate Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance, who's asked me to table five copies of RBC's budget 2012, key indicators. To quote from the document, it talks about the budget having "conservative assumptions for key economic indicators," indicates that they're "confident that the fiscal plan will allow the Alberta government to return to budget balance on schedule."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Blakeman: No. Just myself.

The Speaker: Go ahead. Proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the document that I referenced today in my question to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development in which an internal memo recognizes that the minister of the environment was writing to the Minister of SRD regarding the establishment of a committee to minimize black bears killed at landfills.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a further 20 e-mails and letters out of the hundreds I've received from the following individuals who are seeking the preservation of the Castle wilderness, many of whom have personally visited the Castle and all of whom believe clear-cutting will damage the ecology, watershed, wildlife, and natural species and must be prohibited at all costs: Barbara Collier, Susan Sargent, Marcus Peterson, Hans Buhrmann, Diane Beckett, Jessica Hein, Deanna Renyk, Kristin Cavoukian, James Ramsay, Richard Mertl, Margot Boyd, Marcel Roberge, Doug Alton, Ann Truyens, Adam Grickites, Andrea Hawkes, Shelagh Emmott, Twyla Douaire, Ian Whyte, and Mary Furlong.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Jens and Ulla Hansen of Bonnyville, who wrote to us, "Thank you for standing up for the Grass Root people of Alberta," and enclosed a copy of their utilities bill from January, \$227 more than it was the previous year.

I also have a letter from Eric Latter of Hill Spring, and he writes about how his bill this year is a 58 per cent increase over last year's bill. He wrote to tell us how difficult it is to make ends meet as a low-income senior.

I have a letter from Brian Stalder of Lloyminster, who sent us a note saying that he switched to Direct Energy in December 2011 and that the bill still climbed. He enclosed his bill of \$303.

2:50

I have a letter from the Descheneaux family of Spruce Grove, who told us that as a low-income family they cannot afford the utility costs. They said that their bill in January 2012 was \$924.44.

Finally, I have a note from Valerie Thomsen from High River, who sent us a note saying that her bill for January was \$193.10, and she says that last year at the same period it was \$88. "Outrageous!"

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday under tablings the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere tabled five bar coasters which had a symbol on them which could only be encouraging people to drink. I would like to table today five responsible bar coasters which say: "Pregnancy and Alcohol? Not Worth the Chance." I'll send a copy of the responsible bar coaster to the hon. member, but I think it's important to table these to highlight the fact that drinking while pregnant, drinking while driving, all of these are a danger to society.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, you popped up here about 30 seconds ago on a point of order. Please proceed.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. I would cite Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Mr. Speaker, the member clearly stated that the coasters that we tabled yesterday were inciting people to drink. I don't even know what to say to that other than to say that that's obviously unbecoming language. It's obviously giving false motives to another member.

I mean, coasters are something you put a beverage on. Now, clearly, they are to protest the .05 legislation, which is an attack on people's civil rights, with a whole bunch of other things wrong with it. It will divert resources and probably cause more people to die of drinking and driving because of the resources that we diverted to it, but that's a political protest. Certainly, to somehow say that handing out these coasters, which is a protest of a very poorly drafted bill, is somehow asking people to go out and drink and drive is repugnant language for this House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would enjoy the opportunity to respond to that. A bar coaster, a very simple device used to protect the table from a glass of, presumably, alcohol, and in this case one that's labelled with a line across .05, can only suggest to somebody that it's okay to continue past .05, that it's okay to drink. Coasters are used where people are drinking, so one would assume, then, that it's encouraging people to drink and then

perhaps to drive. I think it's a very reasonable assumption that that bar coaster is an irresponsible methodology to protest a bill.

Mr. Speaker, what I tabled today is a far more responsible thing, and I'm more than happy to provide that hon. member and every member of the House with these bar coasters, which allude to the fact that drinking while pregnant causes physical problems, brain damage, dependency for life, and other things. If the hon. member wants to deal with issues about drinking, I would suggest he deal with them responsibly, and this is a very responsible way to do it.

The Speaker: Well, we've reminded the Assembly in the past that points of order should not be used to extend debate and that they should not be used for amplification of position. I think we've got a clarification here as a result of this recent exchange, and we're now going to move on.

Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Main Estimates 2012-13

Executive Council

The Chair: Before I recognize our hon. Premier, I would like to remind the Assembly of a few points here about the speaking order. The Premier will have 10 minutes for opening. That will be followed by an hour with the opposition and the Premier. Then the 20 minutes after that are reserved for the third party, the Wildrose Alliance, and the Premier. The next 20 minutes are for the fourth party, the NDP, and the Premier. For the next 20 minutes after that members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent member may speak with the Premier, and thereafter any member may speak.

I'm also reminding hon. members that from Standing Order 59.01(4) and reinforced by Government Motion 6, agreed to on February 8, we have a minimum of two hours. At that time the chair will call the two hours.

Hon. Premier, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and hon. members. I'm pleased to appear before this committee to discuss the 2012-2013 Executive Council budget estimates and the 2012-2015 business plan. I'd like to begin by introducing the staff who are with me on the floor. They are Peter Watson, Deputy Minister of Executive Council; Dwight Dibben, deputy clerk of Executive Council; and Elaine Dougan, executive director of corporate services.

This is the first time that I've been before this committee as President of Executive Council, and I want to begin by saying what a pleasure it has been to work with such a group of talented and dedicated people these past four and a half months. They've worked very hard in the time since I was sworn in as Premier to implement what I am the first to admit is a very ambitious agenda, and we're just getting started.

Two weeks ago our government laid out a plan for moving forward with the Speech from the Throne and Budget 2012. This is a plan that is based on all the optimism we feel and that Albertans feel for where our province is going and what the future holds for us. We know there are challenges ahead, and we are

prepared to meet them boldly and to provide the leadership that Albertans expect from their government.

The Speech from the Throne and Budget 2012 will be the foundation for engaging with Albertans to determine what their priorities are and what outcomes they want to see from us. Instead of telling Albertans what government is doing, we will ask them what they want from government. We will listen, and we will deliver. The outcomes that Albertans identify will drive everything that we do and every decision that we make. Part of this work includes a commitment to results-based budgeting to ensure that all our program decisions and dollar allocations are being properly scrutinized, and that's why I welcome the opportunity to come today before this committee.

I want to assure all members of the committee that Executive Council will take its turn under the microscope, just like every other department will, to rebuild our budget from the ground up and make sure that we're getting the best results. In Executive Council and across government we will deliver the outcomes that Albertans want in the most effective, responsible, and sustainable way possible.

I begin with an overview of the Budget 2012 allocation for Executive Council. Overall, it is \$31.5 million, an increase of \$1.4 million, which is 4.7 per cent, from the last fiscal year. This increase is due almost entirely to staffing costs, including funding for the 4 per cent salary adjustment and benefit increases that apply to all government staff. There is also a one-time allocation of \$100,000 for Alberta events and programs to mark the Diamond Jubilee of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. I will also note that the Regulatory Review Secretariat was transferred from Finance to Executive Council along with a budget of \$952,000 and six FTEs, or full-time equivalents, Mr. Chair.

3:00

I turn now to a review of Executive Council's program areas and priorities as outlined in the business plan. Executive Council includes my offices in the Legislature and in McDougall Centre in Calgary, the deputy minister's office, the cabinet co-ordination office, policy co-ordination office, the Regulatory Review Secretariat, the protocol office, the Public Affairs Bureau, and administrative support for the office of the Lieutenant Governor and the Alberta Order of Excellence Council, Mr. Chairman.

Our 2012-15 business plan lays out the following priority initiatives for Executive Council: ensuring that government policy and planning are co-ordinated and effective, co-ordinating government strategic planning, continuing to implement a strategic communications plan, and co-ordinating with ministries and organizations to promote Alberta's energy, immigration, employment, investment, and tourism potential to the world.

Mr. Chairman, I want to take a moment to put the work of Executive Council in the context of the new way that this government is doing things. I spoke earlier of my expectation that government will move to a more outcome-based orientation. To accomplish this, I expect government to function as a single team, not as individual bureaucracies within departmental silos. We need to work together, and I will be looking to Executive Council to facilitate the shift that needs to happen within government. This will involve building clarity on the right things and providing advice and strategic direction to ensure that everyone is aligned around the same goals. This will involve getting to good outcomes by following good process.

We will engage Albertans in an ongoing dialogue that asks them what they want from government and deliver on those outcomes. I expect our staff to support strong regulatory review, policy development, decision-making, and strategic planning processes. I expect

them to ask critical questions about emerging directions and policies.

As government it is important to have a dialogue among Albertans and stakeholders and to gather and represent divergent perspectives to decision-makers. I expect thorough research and analysis to inform the decision-making process, and I want to see capacity-building within ministries and within our partners to deliver on the government's commitments.

One of those commitments is ensuring that our regulatory system is doing its job effectively and efficiently. I noted earlier that the Regulatory Review Secretariat was moved from Finance to Executive Council, and this is an area where I expect to see leadership and results. Linking the secretariat to the policy co-ordination office will help ensure that our regulatory systems are focused on the policy objectives that we're trying to achieve as a government.

We're building from a strong base, which is looking at how we can ease the regulatory burden on small business. We've already mandated regular reviews of regulations to ensure their continued effectiveness and relevancy. We need to ensure that our regulatory systems are doing their jobs in the best way possible. We do this by recognizing that the regulatory system has a role to play in developing positive economic, environmental, and social outcomes for Albertans. But there are also costs to be borne, both by government and by industry. For our province to enjoy robust and sustainable growth, we need to keep the two in balance, and our government will.

Executive Council will also be charged with establishing clear measures of performance and clarity on issues, outcomes, and deliverables under the mandates that I've set for each member of the cabinet team. Part of my commitment to Albertans is that we will measure our performance as government and report on it regularly to Albertans. By doing things in better, smarter ways, we will deliver better services to Albertans.

I'll stop there, Mr. Chairman, and am now prepared to take questions from the committee members. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Premier.

The next hour will be for the opposition and the Premier. The chair would like to make sure that we have 20 minute chunks so that the hon. member will have dialogue with the Premier, or do you prefer your 10 minutes and the Premier 10 minutes?

Dr. Sherman: We'll go back and forth.

The Chair: Twenty minutes back and forth. Okay. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome the Premier to her first Executive Council estimates. I'm also proud to say that this is my first time as Leader of the Opposition.

Albertans do want leadership from their government. They want good policy, they want their government to manage their hard-earned tax dollars wisely, and they want to hear the truth from their leaders. In spite of what the Speech from the Throne may say, we know that this is an election year, and everything must be taken with a grain of salt, especially the budget. The main role of Executive Council is to be the head and to provide direction, strategic direction, to the rest of the government body, but this government department has just become a talking head. Here's why: Mr. Chairman, the Speech from the Throne was the most uninspiring Speech from the Throne in the last few decades. It didn't really tell us who we are as a people, where we're going, where we need to go, and how we're going to get there. It had no vision.

On the budget, Mr. Chairman, this government continues down its path of addiction to nonrenewable energy resources. We have major addiction problems in this province, and the biggest is this government's addiction to nonrenewable resources to fund our basic, core programs. We have a deficit after five successive years of deficits. Oil is at a hundred dollars a barrel, every Albertan is working and paying tax, we have so much industrial investment here, and we have a deficit. This is as good as it gets. We should have surpluses in the bank, money going into a savings account for children for tomorrow.

We have a fiscal deficit, but we also have a social deficit. I do want to talk about outcomes. Here are the outcomes. We have the lowest high school graduation rate in the nation. We have the lowest postsecondary participation rate in the nation. We have amongst the highest fees in the nation.

We have the biggest spending health care system with amongst the worst performance in the nation. Once you get into care, it's world-class care, but getting in is the big problem. In fact, the Health Quality Council report today said that there's a culture of fear and intimidation for physicians. The hospital and acute-care system has been in crisis year after year after year despite the multiple reports, the number one spending issue in the country. The Health Quality Council report also says that the AHS experiment hasn't worked. Physicians don't know who to turn to when there are problems and solutions.

Our seniors are getting nickelled and dimed. They built this wonderful province and this wonderful nation. They worked through tough times, through wars, through lean times. They paid their taxes, and they paid their dues, yet they're being separated under involuntary separation. They're having to get divorced because they can't afford this private care.

These are the outcomes. To suggest that we're going to focus on outcomes, does that suggest that we actually didn't do it before, that we didn't measure our performance? This is the performance of a government that once was a source of good. It was a source of solutions, Mr. Chairman. It is a government that is now a source of our problems.

With respect to the estimates of Executive Council there's very little detail included in the estimates, the breakdown of funds allocated to this ministry. For example, line 1.1 on page 104 of the estimates states that the Premier's office has an annual budget of just shy of \$11 million, but no breakdown is provided. My question to the Premier: will you provide a detailed description of how these funds are allocated? Tell us how many airplane flights you've been on for campaigning, whether that's included in here, and tell us how you're enjoying the fleet of four executive vehicles.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The numbers that are included on page 104 are, particularly, detailed in the way that we have conventionally reported. I can certainly provide the hon. member with more detail, and if he'd like me to do that now, then I will.

3:10

First of all, Mr. Chairman, we have the office of the Premier and Executive Council, which, as I said before, includes the Premier's offices in Edmonton and Calgary, including correspondence and communications. It includes the deputy minister's office; the cabinet co-ordination office, which provides organizational and administrative support to cabinet and to key committees; the policy co-ordination office, which supports decision-makers in ministries by

facilitating a collaborative approach for strategic planning and policy development across government; the Regulatory Review Secretariat, which leads government's regulatory reform agenda and provides oversight for the ongoing review of provincial regulation, which, as I said before, was transferred from the Department of Finance; the protocol office, which provides co-ordination for visiting foreign delegations and government ceremonial events and management of Government House operations and funding for the Alberta Order of Excellence.

As I said, Mr. Chairman, the Regulatory Review Secretariat, which was just transferred from the Department of Finance to Executive Council, represents a budget of \$952,000 and six full-time equivalent positions. There was an administrative transfer of \$556,000 and three full-time equivalent positions, existing resources from Treasury Board and Enterprise for three positions in the policy co-ordination office that were previously funded through the corporate human resources executive mobility program; as I said before, an increase for a 4 per cent salary adjustment, which was standard across the board in government this year, standard wage increments and changes to benefits; and a \$100,000 one-time funding for Alberta's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012, for a total of \$10.9 million, which is an increase of 6.5 per cent, keeping in mind that that increase is partly connected to existing resources that were transferred from the Department of Finance for work that was previously being done in another ministry.

There is the office of the Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Chairman, which represents an expense of \$514,000 projected in the estimates, which provides administrative planning and communications support to the Lieutenant Governor. Of course, the Lieutenant Governor's salary is paid by the federal government, and the work that is done for the Lieutenant Governor with respect to much of his ceremonial protocol is also covered by the federal government.

We have a department of corporate services, which represents a budget of \$2.4 million, which sees an increase of 6.7 per cent, Mr. Chairman, which includes the office of the managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau. It manages the human resource, finance, and administrative needs of Executive Council; it manages IT support and development for Executive Council; and it's responsible for business plan and budget preparation, performance measurement co-ordination, annual report developments, records management, and FOIP administration. It includes the central budget for administrative costs; for example, Service Alberta support services, training for all Public Affairs Bureau staff, general office equipment, and supplies. Again, that increase of 6.7 per cent included a 4 per cent increase with respect to the standard wage increments.

We also account in this budget for corporate communications to a value of \$12.6 million, a 4.6 per cent increase, which supplies professionals to ministries to support two-way communications with Albertans by planning and implementing communications initiatives that deliver important information on government programs, services, and policies.

Mr. Chairman, I don't think that we can overestimate the importance of that work right now. We know that the issues we're facing as Albertans are all about building for the future, being optimistic, knowing that we need to build our economy, and a very big part of that is continuing to export our resources.

Now, we know from the discussions that we've had in this House and across the province in the past three to four months, since I've been Premier, that the work that has to happen with respect to the Keystone pipeline and the Gateway pipeline is critical for Alberta's economic development. We also know, Mr. Chairman, that one of the things that we need to be talking to

people about in those jurisdictions is the importance of oil sands not only for our own economic development but in terms of strong economic partnerships with the United States and opening up our markets to Asia.

When I think about that, Mr. Chairman, and I think about some of the trips that I've been taking, to Washington in particular and to Ottawa, to talk about the work that we're doing in Alberta, the message that we're delivering is critically important in terms of what our product is, how we're extracting that resource, what our record is with respect to greenhouse gas emissions, and to make sure that people know that in Alberta we're very proud of not only our economic development but our environmental stewardship. It was very clear to me, when I was in Washington, that being able to deliver that message makes a difference to decision-makers.

Now, there is no doubt, Mr. Chair, that due to the circumstances we're seeing around some political developments in the United States right now, there has been somewhat of a delay with respect to the decision around Keystone. But it's just as important for us to be able to discuss with decision-makers who will ultimately be involved in making those decisions exactly what our record is. They are very open to that, and our message is very clear. We believe that Keystone matters because we need to ensure that we have a strong economic partnership with our closest neighbours and some of our most longstanding trading partners, and for the United States it matters.

One of the things that our corporate communications department does is actually speak to the issues surrounding energy security, environmental sustainability, and long-term economic development. So when I think about the work that we're investing through our Public Affairs Bureau in the messages that are telling the good story about Alberta products, that's a very important connection for us to make, and it's a commitment that this government is very committed to do.

Today in question period, Mr. Chair, there was a question with respect to the vote tomorrow at the European Union around the fuel quality directive. Again, we have offices and we have ministers who are spending time, working with our Public Affairs Bureau, to tell that good story in terms of the importance of not discriminating against our resources in the fuel quality directive decision. That means that we do spend money on communications, we do spend money on our international offices, and we ensure that we're investing the time to tell that story.

That department also plans and co-ordinates our government-wide internal communications to employees. It provides advertising consultation, which I spoke about before. It manages the government of Alberta website, which, again, tells that story, and co-ordinates our crossgovernment standards for all ministry websites. And it provides technical support for major government news conferences. Again, Mr. Chair, we know that we see a 4 per cent increase as a result of staffing changes.

The other area that the hon. member asked about was a breakdown with respect to those numbers. Part of the work that we do through those numbers is involved in promoting Alberta. That estimate is a \$5 million estimate, and there's no funding change for 2012-13. Again, Mr. Chair, that promotes the province of Alberta as the best place to live, to work, to invest, and to play within the country and around the world. It focuses on the portfolios of work and investment to attract the labour, which we know is so important, and the capital that will allow the province to continue to thrive so that we know that we can rely on the projections that we see in this year's budget.

In conjunction with other ministries, as I talked about, we initiate and co-ordinate energy advocacy and communications efforts across Canada, across the United States, and globally, and

we support outreach via the web and, through other communications strategies, everything that we need to do to be telling the good story about Alberta. When I think about the work that we're doing with respect to something like the Gateway pipeline, it's very important, Mr. Chair, for us to know that that story with respect to what's good for economic development in Alberta will also be very important in terms of the Canadian discussion with respect to a Canadian energy strategy. The oil sands are not only a resource that's available to benefit us as Albertans, but it has tremendous economic benefits across the country, and it's important for us.

One of the things that I've done since I became Premier is to talk with Canadians, with other Premiers, with people in Ottawa, Quebec City, and in Toronto, about the emotional connection to what these resources can mean for Canadians across this country. We know that in Alberta we are very much the economic engine of the country, but we don't want to just say that; we want to demonstrate the fact that we want to work in partnership with industry across this country. We want to ensure that we're working in partnership with respect to the extraction of resources. If there's research that's being done here, Mr. Chair, that we can share with other jurisdictions, we want to be able to do that.

3:20

We're seeing some very good examples around how we can cooperate with other jurisdictions. There's some work that we're beginning right now that will take place between the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Cape Breton with respect to coal gasification. We know that because of the resources that Nova Scotia has and their opportunity and their desire to be able to develop their economy, we've done research that can be helpful to them. Now, some of that research will be part of proprietary interest that industry has. So as we build those partnerships around what a Canadian energy strategy can mean, it will also include partnering with industry so that people right across this country can see that the resources that we have here that have allowed us to invest in research will continue to allow us to build strong Canadian partnerships and to build a strong Canadian energy economy.

As we move ahead with those discussions, what we're seeing from Premiers right across the country is a true understanding and acceptance that it's important to work in partnership. You know, it's interesting. We have a very interesting relationship with the province of Quebec, a province which, of course, just like Alberta, very particularly guards their provincial jurisdiction. When we talk about a Canadian energy strategy, one of the qualifications always with respect to a Canadian energy strategy is to ensure that our primary objective is to ensure that we are protecting our provincial jurisdiction. It's quite interesting, as we go across the country, to see that that's of primary importance to all provinces. As a result of that, we have to ensure that the partnerships that will take place will be between provinces with support from the federal government and not be part only of leadership coming from the federal government.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Speaking of a talking head, I actually hoped to engage the Premier in a discussion, not a diatribe.

Mr. Chairman, how much time do I have?

The Chair: Just before you go on, I asked earlier if you wanted to combine the 20 minutes together, dialoguing, talking, or have 10

minutes each. You said 20, so you're going to get 20 minutes to have a dialogue.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chairman, we'll go at it. I didn't know the Premier was so long winded. I enjoy her enthusiasm for Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, a couple of questions I have. I'd better lump a couple of them into my few minutes because we're going to get another 20-minute diatribe. The Premier made a decision to add the Regulatory Review Secretariat to the purview of Executive Council immediately after being elected leader. There are a number of questions. What was the government doing with respect to regulatory review for the last four years, or 40 years for that matter? Is that to suggest that they weren't doing any regulatory reviews? The question has to be asked: what was the rationale for this move? Was it an effort for the Premier to have full control of the process? Was it just politicking? Is she saying that the government and the cabinet – most of the cabinet members she was a colleague of. Who was in charge of this? What were they doing for the last four years?

Let's talk about the other half of the budget of Executive Council. It goes to the propaganda bureau, or should I say the Public Affairs Bureau. Fifty per cent more than the office of the Premier, which is responsible for all activities relating to policy. If we add promoting Alberta, that budget line, which is also a communications function – I believe the way to promote Alberta is that the proof should be in the pudding, Mr. Chairman. The proof should be in the pudding. That's how you promote Alberta. Have others brag about us after they see the diversity of this province.

The Chair: You're in the second 20 minutes now. Do you still want to have dialogue?

Dr. Sherman: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, the government spends double on spin than it does on policy development and co-ordination. The PAB is spin machinery to suit, before the election, the political aspirations of a political party. How much of that is related to investments just before an election to make Albertans perceive that you're doing the right thing when, clearly, we've stated the outcome of this government: the worst performing health care system in the country, five successive deficits with oil at \$100 a barrel, seniors getting nickelled and dimed? How much of this political spin does this PAB do?

Can the Premier explain why, out of all the roles the Executive Council might take, it has chosen to make PR its most significant role? The most significant role is decision-making, leadership, and vision, not PR and spin. Albertans are sick and tired of being lied to.

Mr. Rodney: Language.

Dr. Sherman: I withdraw that, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you to the hon. member.

The PAB introduced its social media program in the 2009-10 business plan. We now have the government of Alberta on YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, Twitter, and the blog, where entries are often signalled by PAB staff. Do Albertans need to be told how the health care system is fantastic, or do they need to just experience it and realize it? Mr. Chairman, I believe they need to experience it and realize it. Once they do get into the health care system, it's actually world class, but the experience of trying to get into the system is devastating on families. People are suffering, as was

tabled in the Health Quality Council report. My question is: how much money will be spent trying to spin that report, which tells us we're still in crisis?

Can the Premier discuss the government's risk avoidance or risk mitigation strategies when using third-party social media sites, the methods used to ensure compliance with social media policy and to address noncompliance and any plans to deal with the consequences of changes in policy by the third-party sites such as sale of data? How does the PAB staff report on social media to program staff in ministries? Is the government actually using any of the feedback received, or is it purely a public relations, PR, spin exercise?

I have a question. It's interesting. I was looking at a report on the computer the other day, and actually in the last few weeks every time you look at the newspapers and every time you click on it, the Premier appears on the advertisement, amazingly. The question is: is this a PC Party advertisement, or is it the Public Affairs Bureau, government tax dollars? The timing is amazing, Mr. Chairman. You should check this out. There's no acknowledgement of who paid for this. Is it the PAB, or is it the PC Party? Why is the Premier ashamed of admitting it if it's party dollars? If it's not party dollars, if it's taxpayer dollars, why is the Premier wasting taxpayer dollars on advertising? How much money are they wasting for pure partisan, political purposes heading into an election?

I ask these questions. What portion of the PAB budget is allocated for advertising, be it on radio, television, billboards, and these ads? What is your expenditure in relation to the election cycle? Is the spending heavily weighted just before the election?

Mr. Chairman, this is about honesty, transparency, and trust. This Premier was supposed to be about real change. She promised change. This is worse than the old. I want the other Premier back. Many Albertans want the other Premier back. This was supposed to be a good change. This isn't the change people voted for. It's more of the same.

I've asked many questions. I look forward to the Premier's answers.

Thank you.

3:30

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I said in my opening comments, we have right now an Executive Council, a Regulatory Review Secretariat, which, as I mentioned, was transferred from the Department of Finance. I'm surprised that the hon. member would ask the question with respect to what that was since he has been in this House for as long as I have, and even before I had this job, I was very aware of what that role was. That was a role of an office within the Department of Finance that was charged with ensuring that on a regular basis regulations within government were reviewed to ensure that we weren't standing in the way of good public policy.

The reason that I thought it was important – and it is change, Mr. Chairman – to bring the Regulatory Review Secretariat to our office, to the office of the Premier, was to ensure, as I said in my opening comments, that we were actually co-ordinating the work. What we know is that the way the government has worked in the past – and change is very important and very good, and we're making a lot of it, and I said in my opening comments that it was important to do that, to begin to co-ordinate approaches to these issues. What I decided was that the work that was happening in Finance was becoming too isolated with respect to the work of people who were charged directly to the Department of Finance.

Since 1999 our regulatory reform agenda was overseen by that secretariat, and the addition to our policy co-ordination office, as I said, reinforces the importance of effective and efficient regulatory systems that are co-ordinated across the government of Alberta. The system works with all ministries now to support the development of quality regulations by directing regulatory reform initiatives, of course eliminating superfluous regulations and ensuring that any regulations that are in place are actually necessary, Mr. Chair.

We have, with respect to social policy, very strong internal policies on web-based security which are led by Service Alberta, and we actually have a social media policy, Mr. Chair, which really ensures that it can apply broadly to the use of social media when we're providing information and government announcements, programs, and policies. The feedback that we get from Albertans on our communications efforts matters. It's not about advertising; it's about communicating and dialoguing with Albertans.

There's no doubt that there's going to be a provincial election. We actually passed legislation to ensure that that's going to happen. But we're here today in this Legislature discussing a budget because the world does not stop simply because there is going to be a provincial election. The business of government must continue, and the business of government continues on an ongoing basis. So today we're discussing budget, and I've referred to the throne speech. We communicate with Albertans with respect to those issues because those are issues that matter to Albertans.

We know that it's important to have policies with respect to social media, and our policies outline how social media will be used when communicating with Albertans. We ensure that staff are not doing anything else except representing the views of the government of Alberta to Albertans, and that is very important in terms of engagement.

Very often in this House, Mr. Chair, we'll hear from parties on the other side that it's important to consult, that it's important to engage. We even, surprisingly, will hear the accusation that we are not listening to Albertans. We listen to Albertans, and one of the ways that we do that is that we communicate information to them because we want to ensure that the dialogue we're having with Albertans is an informed dialogue about the future.

It's been pretty exciting in the past five months and for the year before that, when I was running for leadership of my party, to know how excited Albertans were about wanting to communicate, to see change, to see integrated long-term planning, and to ensure that we were connecting decisions that government was making directly to their lives. It's very important to us as a government that we're ensuring that people feel that government is accessible. We have a front bench of ministers that spend their days communicating through their communications officers and directly with Albertans.

I'm going to go back, Mr. Chair, to something that I said earlier, which is that our future economic opportunities will come from being able to communicate around the world the good stories about what's going on in Alberta. Frankly, standing up and saying that the proof of the pudding is in the tasting is not a compelling message that sends any signal to the rest of the world as to how wonderful Alberta is, what a unique jurisdiction it is, how much we care about our communities and our environment, and why they should be attracted to come here to work, to invest, and to even come as tourists.

When I think about the work that we will continue to do in terms of developing a communications plan and talking about our successes, I'm actually very proud every day of the work that the Public Affairs Bureau does. What I've heard and what I think

many of my colleagues have heard in the past year is that Albertans are tired of the negativity. They're tired of the cynicism. They're tired of the pessimism. They're proud Albertans, and they want a government that's proud of Alberta.

That's what we're doing, Mr. Chair. We are travelling the country. We are in the United States. We have international offices that are talking about our successes. They're talking about our accomplishments. We know, not because we're members of government but because we live in this great province, that this truly is the best jurisdiction to live in in the world. Albertans want us to talk about that, and they want us to deliver those messages in a way that will improve our economic benefits.

I know that when I first became Premier and was first sworn in, one of the first things that many members of this House suggested that I do was exactly what I did, travel to Washington and talk about Alberta's story. In fact, Mr. Chair, there was criticism from some members of this House that I didn't go soon enough. So it seems a little inconsistent to me that today those same people would stand up and suggest that that isn't important work to be done.

I know from the response that we were able to see in Washington, Toronto, and Ottawa and from some of the success we've had in working with our federal government partners that it's worth while to do it. Albertans know that we can't live in isolation. They know that we need to be partners in Canada, we need to be partners around the world, and we have to understand that we're international citizens.

Many people who are living in this province have come from other places, Mr. Chair. They've come here to retain their links with their home countries but to ensure that they're part of our great economic success. That's important because we actually need them to be here to do the work. There's no doubt, if we look at some of the issues that have come up in the last three or four months, that we have to ensure that we're attracting people with skills in order to do the work that needs to be done.

We're a province right now of 3.7 million people, and that's wonderful. We're going to be 5 million, 6 million people in the not too very distant future. It's interesting to look at some of the projections because some of the projections that we see could have us at 10 million people by 2050. My sense is that we're probably going to be there, and we're going to be there sooner than we think. That is a tremendous blessing for us, to know that we are fundamentally changing the character of our province, our economy, the way we work, the way we live, and what we do every day. When that starts to happen, being able to talk about our story and to talk about our success is going to be very important, Mr. Chair.

So the work that we're able to do through Executive Council to advance that agenda is terribly important, and Albertans know that.

As we move ahead and we take a look at some of the issues that are involved, we know that we're going to have to continue to be strong environmental stewards, and we're going to have to reach out to people that have concerns with respect to economic development and what development looks like in the oil sands.

3:40

When I think about that work and the ongoing work of government and the way that we tell our story to Albertans and the way we tell our story to Canadians and to people around the world, we're going to have to continue to support on an ongoing basis the work of the Public Affairs Bureau. We haven't seen increases in spending in that shop. We haven't seen increases beyond the 4 per cent salary increase. So to suggest that there's

fluctuation in election years and nonelection years simply isn't the case, Mr. Chair. We consistently do the work. We consistently tell the story. We have strong policies in place that allow for social media to be used.

I have to say that I'm a little surprised by the hon. member suggesting that it's not important to be on social media, to suggest that it's odd for the government of Alberta to be on Facebook, to be on YouTube. What we believe is that people around the world and people in Alberta that are making decisions about policy and deciding what they want for the future of this province are accessing communication in a way that's entirely different from the way that we've done it before. We're operating in a sphere that's changing by leaps and bounds every month. The fact that we're able to respond and to tell that story in some cases to much younger audiences, where we know that sometimes there's a preoccupation with issues, particularly around environmental sustainability, is critical to the way that we deliver that communications message.

When I think about the innovative thinking, the work that we're doing to support our offices around the world, the consulting work that must be done if we're concerned about issues like the fuel quality directive that's going on right now in Europe, we have to ensure that we have smart people who are communicating and developing a story that connects to people. When I think about what we will do and what we will continue to do, it's to use the resources that we have in the Premier's office to develop that policy and to ensure that every opportunity to tell our story and to build our economy will be taken advantage of, Mr. Chair.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Premier is right. Albertans are tired. They are tired of the same old same old. In fact, in order for Alberta to go to the next level, to go to heights never seen before – and I believe we are a great place to live. That's why we're all here. But I believe Alberta is capable of so much more, so much more than we're actually getting right now.

We need to attract engineers, hard workers with dreams and ideas, teachers, doctors, nurses, health care workers, but when people get here – a report just came out today, a report commissioned by the health minister's Health Quality Council, that reports to him, saying that there's a culture of fear and intimidation of doctors in this province, and this culture is pervasive. Twenty-five per cent of the physicians were brave enough to report these issues; 75 per cent were scared. Yes, we are the bright hope for the world, but people should not fear their government. When people fear their government, there is tyranny. When the government fears the people, we have liberty. That's the Alberta that I want to see, where their government fears its people. Yes, Premier, a government that truly fears its people.

This Premier: we thought there was change. How did the change start off? It started with your Minister of Finance swearing at somebody, an elected representative. It started off – I'm not sure if this came . . .

An Hon. Member: How about the estimates?

Dr. Sherman: This pertains to the estimates of the PAB because there's spin required, spin from the PAB required to manage the message from the Premier's office on this issue.

The question is: is it the Minister of Municipal Affairs who unilaterally boycotted a meeting, or did that directive come straight from the Premier's office? Social media was used by the Premier's chief of staff to intimidate another elected member, to slander and libel her.

The Chair: Hon member, we are now on the third 20 minutes, so the last 20 minutes for you, sir.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One of the Executive Council's main roles is to provide policy planning to all government ministries, not the least of which is the Ministry of Health and Wellness. On page 32 of the Executive Council 2012-15 business plan under Priority Initiatives it says:

- 1.1 Provide advice and analysis to support policy development that aligns with government priorities and ensures that decision-makers have the best possible information with which to make decisions.
- 1.2 Coordinate the government's strategic planning process, support the development of the Government of Alberta Strategic Plan and report on the progress of government priorities.
- 1.3 An enhanced focus and engagement by the public service on integrated public policy analysis and innovative and efficient service delivery. Ensure quality interaction between the public service, government and society as a whole.
- 1.4 Work collaboratively with ministries to improve the quality of Alberta's regulatory systems and oversee the ongoing review of regulations so that policy outcomes can be achieved effectively and efficiently.

Mr. Chair, this is interesting with regard to the way that health policy has developed over the last several years. There continue to be questions raised about who is actually developing health policy. Is it Alberta Health Services, is it Alberta Health and Wellness, or is it the Premier's office? What measures have been taken through Executive Council to improve and increase the policy development capacity of Alberta Health and Wellness now that they have been charged with the responsibility of province-wide decisions as well as for Alberta Health Services?

What influence does Executive Council have with health policy decisions? Is Executive Council briefed on all policy decisions before they're made, announced, or implemented, or does Executive Council make those decisions?

On page 32 of the Executive Council 2012-15 business plan strategy 1.1 is to "provide advice and analysis to support policy development" and ensure "that decision-makers have the best possible information with which to make decisions." What extra support has Executive Council provided to the Ministry of Health and Wellness to cope with the monumental task they have of reining in Alberta Health Services, an organization with \$9.6 billion in spending, an organization about which the Health Quality Council report today, commissioned by this government, says that the AHS experiment has been a failure, that it does not provide Albertans the necessary care and that lives have been endangered, that physicians have been intimidated, that the ERs are still in crisis. The government's own report.

Page 32 of the Executive Council 2012-15 business plan has a performance measure that is a percentage for "satisfaction of Policy Coordination Office clients with products and services." The last actual number for this measure is 93 per cent while the target for the next three years is 85 per cent. Can the Premier explain how this measure is actually taken and which clients this measure refers to, or is it the arm's-length government agencies, boards, or commissions? Or does this measure refer to government ministries? If this is referring to government ministries, is this measure not misleading? Surely, government ministries will not show dissatisfaction with the Premier's office.

Mr. Chair, there are many questions that need to be answered: policy and delivery and the outcomes and the outputs of our government and our government system. The number one

expenditure of any government in this nation is health care. This report today was so damning – so damning – of the government's performance on health care.

I'd also like to put into the record a graph from the Institute for Public Economics from the University of Alberta, the historical expenditure of the big two, Alberta Health and Education, absolute expenditures.

3:50

The Chair: Hon. member, the chair should remind you that we have the Health estimates coming up on March 7.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chair, I'll bring it back to decision-making and health care policy decision-making.

There's a lot of money being spent here in the Premier's office on policy. Premier, you gave a speech, a vision for this province. You tabled a budget. You set the direction for this province. You set policy, and then we were talking about outcomes. Mr. Chair, this has all to do with estimates. There's 30-some million dollars here being spent. Here is the outcome.

I have a question about policy set by the Premier's office. Alberta's Health Legislation: this is a policy document that was presented by the current minister of health to government caucus. It was presented. It pertains to privatization of health care, and the government spin machinery has to make this story go away.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Chairman, point of order. We've got to have some relevance here, *Beauchesne's* 459. I don't think that has anything to do with the estimates of Executive Council.

The Chair: Hon member, I remind you that we have March 7 for the health care estimates, so stay on the estimates of the Executive Council if you will.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chair, it is about the estimates because of the policy direction.

Debate Continued

Dr. Sherman: The question is on who's in charge and on the lack of performance of a government. Resources in Executive Council, in the Public Affairs Bureau, need to be used to sell a story that Albertans aren't buying.

Albertans deserve the truth. This is an amazing province. The people who comprise this province are amazing people, and they deserve nothing but the best from their leadership. They deserve honesty, the truth, world-class health care, world-class access to health care, world-class access to education, and they don't deserve the Public Affairs Bureau selling them a bill of goods that isn't true.

Premier, please, just tell the truth.

Ms Redford: Well, I have to say, Mr. Chair, that I'm a little confused because I was standing in this House an hour and a half ago, and the hon. member told me that the Health Quality Council report was actually a whitewash and a gift to the government because it didn't criticize the government. An hour and a half later the hon. member tells me that this is an absolute indictment of the health care system. I guess one of the things I'd ask is: where is the spin actually coming from?

The role of Executive Council – maybe we'll make up a little brochure for next year – is to actually do what our priority initiatives

are, and that's to co-ordinate decision-making in government to ensure that the right information is brought to the table so that the government, that's elected by Albertans, is able to set a direction for the future that responds to the needs of Albertans. When I look at those initiatives, Mr. Chair, I know that we do all of those things.

I won't go on any more about the Regulatory Review Secretariat. I'm very proud of the work that they're doing. What I will say is that within Executive Council we co-ordinate the work of ministers, we co-ordinate the work of cabinet, and through the policy co-ordination office we support and co-ordinate the roles of ministers and deputy ministers to ensure that the right people are at the table to make decisions that are going to matter for Albertans. We need to align the work that departments are doing, and we need to ensure that all of the agendas are actually integrated in a way that allows for long-term policy planning.

Mr. Chair, that is one of the things that Albertans told us they wanted to see, and we're happy to be able to change the structure of what we're doing to ensure that that alignment is happening. We have the ability through the Department of Human Services, which is a new department in government, to bring together a number of departments that needed to be better aligned. In that department we were able to bring together mental health initiatives, employment training, children and youth services, and to deal with people who are very vulnerable in our community.

Mr. Chair, you'll know that before this, I was Minister of Justice, and through the safe communities agenda we were able to do the same thing. What that allows us to do is to not only be reactive. It allows us to anticipate what's coming and to ensure that we're building and planning for the future, whether we're talking about health care or education or whether we're talking about economic development. So when I think about the work that's done through the Executive Council office, it's fundamental to long-term policy planning for government.

We do have, as these initiatives say, an enhanced focus on engagement. We're engaging with our own members in the public service, with members of the public at large, with stakeholders, with parents, with patients to ensure that information is coming to the table when we make decisions so that they will be made in the best interests of Albertans. Whether we're talking, as I said, Mr. Chair, about health care or whether we're talking about education, we're integrating the input of that information.

Now, I know that there will be another opportunity in the next two hours to talk a little bit more about performance measures, and I'm happy to do that. We have very particular performance measures for the Public Affairs Bureau, for the policy co-ordination office. What we know is that if we take a look at the customer satisfaction surveys and the client satisfaction surveys from people that are interacting with these departments and with our office, they're seeing significant progress. Ninety-three per cent: we're very proud of that; 85 per cent is a very lofty goal. I believe that we'll exceed that.

But, you know, what we're prepared to say, Mr. Chair, is that sometimes things don't always work out exactly as we want them to, and I'll tell you that that's honesty. It's honest and it's truthful to say that we make decisions that we believe are in the best interests of Albertans after co-ordinating the information and bringing the perspective into place and ensuring that the programs are integrated in a way that's actually going to make sense.

You know, Mr. Chair, one of the things that we did do in this budget as it was tabled was really listen to what Albertans were telling us about community and about vulnerable Albertans. One of the things that was very important, that we've had tremendous feedback on, was the decision to actually increase AISH payments

for vulnerable Albertans. That was a great example of an integrated approach to policy that's allowing us to make decisions that reflect the way that Albertans feel about their community.

As we go ahead and take a look at the performance measures for the policy co-ordination office, we can say that we conducted a survey, the survey where we saw a 93 per cent result, between February and March of last year, and it was a web-based survey, so people were not being spoken to directly. They were entirely entitled to express their opinion as they felt it was most appropriate to do, and that's the result that we got.

We're going to continue to aspire to do better because we can always do better, and that's what Albertans are asking for right now from government, excellence. We will continue to achieve excellence if we understand the importance of integrating the work that we're doing in our offices.

The Chair: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, you have about six minutes.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chair, am I done at 4 o'clock?

The Chair: No. You have six minutes.

Dr. Sherman: Six minutes.

Mr. Chair, I can appreciate the challenges the Premier has. Upon her shoulders is tremendous responsibility, a responsibility that I as the Leader of the Opposition must question. She is charged with leading this province. She has been elected by her party to lead Alberta on a path that's best for Albertans. The question is if many of the decisions and the resources in the Premier's Executive Council are being used efficiently and responsibly, leading this province on that path that Albertans truly deserve.

4:00

Mr. Chair, we have a difference of opinion, and that's a wonderful thing about a democratic province and a democratic country. We can express our differences. We can question government on legitimate policy issues, on legitimate expenditures of taxpayer dollars. I believe in the people of this great province. That's why I ran, to serve. I believe in the seniors who built this province and the people who are currently building this province. That's why I stand up and fight for them, to be honest and truthful to them, especially when I was on that side of the bench.

Albertans have known for a long time that they deserve better. Sixty per cent didn't vote last election. They didn't vote. Despite the resources of the governing party they didn't want to get out and vote, while our young men and women are fighting for others to have the right to vote, so I believe they've lost trust, and that trust must begin in the Premier's office and Executive Council.

I thank the Premier for doing her best to answer the questions that were posed. I thank her for taking the position of Premier. It's a very honourable position to have. I just ask her to use Albertans' taxpayer dollars wisely. I ask her to address the two deficits that we face, the fiscal deficit and the social deficit, which some may question as a moral deficit in leadership.

I ask the Premier and the government to provide world-class health care to Albertans where and when they need it. I ask the Premier to offer every child the opportunity for a world-class education. I ask the Premier to lower tuition fees. I ask Executive Council to make these priorities, to lower tuition fees for postsecondary students so that our young people can be the best that they can possibly be, so that our industry may be afforded the labour workforce it requires to meet its needs so that we can take Alberta to a new level. I ask the Premier to lower tuitions and completely delink parental income from postsecondary students.

I ask the Premier and Executive Council to have a strategic policy direction not to nickel and dime our seniors, to have a strategic policy direction to get our seniors out of health care facilities and keep them in their own homes, where couples can stay together with dignity and honour until their last day. I ask the Premier and her Executive Council to spend these resources that they have, millions of dollars in their office, to balance the books, to talk about fair taxation and fairness. I ask the Premier to put our money away for the future in endowment funds for arts and culture and for amateur sport for our children, for municipalities.

I ask the Executive Council to cut the Public Affairs Bureau in half so that we don't need to advertise. I ask the Premier and Executive Council to use their resources, that they're given by the people, in their office to have policy and direction and vision to save for the future.

Mr. Chair, I think that enough has been said. I thank the Premier and I thank the Executive Council for doing their best. It's an honour for me to have an opportunity to question them.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I find the hon. member's comments quite interesting. There's no doubt that those are the issues exactly that Albertans are concerned about, and they're well reflected in our budget and our throne speech.

The Chair: We have finished the first hour. The next 20 minutes will be reserved for the Wildrose and the Premier. We have an arrangement here. Ten minutes each or a combined 20 minutes?

Mr. Anderson: We're going to try to combine it for 20 minutes. Is that okay?

The Chair: A combined 20 minutes back and forth.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to welcome with me today Bill Bewick and James Johnson. They're two outstanding researchers that we have working in our office. They're, obviously, very clean-shaven and well-kept individuals. Sometimes they don't shower or shave for weeks we work them so hard.

I would hope that as we go back and forth here, Premier, I'll keep my questions short and that you would keep your answers short. I think that respect is two-way and that communication is two-way. I'm willing to ask the questions in a respectful manner, and I hope that you won't try to run out the clock because you're afraid to answer them, and I'm assuming you won't be afraid to answer them. [interjection] I hope she won't be afraid to answer them. That's why I'm saying this, so that we get the short answers.

First I want to talk about the fiscal leadership of your department. Obviously, it's going up \$1.5 million. Part of that's due to salaries. There's also the issue, of course, that you participated, while you were a cabinet minister at the time, in increasing your own salary by 30 per cent as your first act as a cabinet. There was, obviously, the Jasper junket that we've heard about to the Jasper Park Lodge for the caucus, the prebudget tour conducted for about \$100,000 after the budget was essentially agreed to and printed. In other words, it wasn't. It was a public relations campaigning situation. And, of course, there was a 7 per cent increase in program spending and so forth.

Then there are others. You went forward with the \$2 billion carbon capture and storage. There's the \$300 million for MLA

offices. We could go on and on and on, but let's just stick to your department and stuff that you have direct control over now.

Why have you not spent more time in these first few months of your premiership setting a tone? Now, let's not count Bill 1 because Bill 1, I'm assuming, your government is doing anyway. Who doesn't believe in results-based budgeting? Why wouldn't you come in and roll your own salary back 30 per cent, and why wouldn't you freeze your department's spending? Why would you go on the Jasper junket, and why would you go on the nonbudget tour for \$100,000? Why would you do these things? How is that setting a tone for fiscal austerity, Premier?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Chair, I think it's fascinating that we're talking about budgets that aren't part of my budget, but I guess I'll just clarify that first of all. The work that is done by any caucus in this Legislature is funded through the office of the Leg. Assembly, the LAO. The LAO provides a budget to all caucuses, and that budget is used, as I understand it, for caucus business. I'm very pleased to have had a report from our whip that through the process that we will go through this fiscal year, we will in fact be returning \$1.5 million to the LAO out of our caucus budget. I think that's a pretty good signal with respect to fiscal restraint.

I think it's also quite interesting to think about whether or not the budgets that are being expended by caucuses are being expended for political purposes, and it's a very important question, Mr. Chair. I know that from our perspective as a caucus we follow the rules, and I would hope that all caucuses would do the same thing. I also know, with respect to accounting for our funds, that not only do we follow the rules that are set out with respect to the LAO and reporting on expenditures but in many cases and in that particular instance have provided far more detail, that's been provided and filed with the LAO, to ensure that there's not even a slight hint of anything inappropriate having happened or any money having been spent with respect to our caucus budget as Progressive Conservatives.

4:10

I certainly would welcome other caucuses, including this hon. member's caucus, doing exactly the same thing, to go above and beyond with respect to reporting on caucus budget expenditures to ensure that it's not being used for political purposes and probably also, because I'm sure this is something this hon. member cares about, thinking about returning some of that budget, Mr. Chair.

In terms of fiscal definitions, in terms of how we will define our fiscal process, we are going to continue to ensure that we're being accountable.

Mr. Chair, I'm not going to not talk about Bill 1. Bill 1 was a piece of legislation that was passed in this House that committed this government to reviewing a third of government program spending every year, and we're proud of that. We're doing it by legislation because we think that that's the commitment that Albertans want this government to make, and we're prepared to make the commitment.

It's awfully easy to be casual and say: oh, well, we'd do it. Well, we put our name on the line, Mr. Chair. We said that we would do it. We are committed to doing it. We will be involved in both zero-based budgeting and results-based budgeting because we want to ensure that the programs and the services that we are delivering to Albertans are the services that Albertans want to have, that they're being delivered in a way that is having the impact that Albertans want them to have on their life, and that they're being delivered in a cost-effective manner.

We're going to do that through all government departments over a three-year period and then renew the cycle. The reason

that's important is because we can't go on budgeting the way that we have in the past, and I'm proud of the fact that this government has signalled that change. It's a key change, Mr. Chair. It's a key change not only because it signals to Albertans that we're committed to that change, but it also says to our public servants: "Let's think differently about the work that we're doing within the public service. Let's think about the programs we're delivering, how we're delivering them, whether or not they'll have the impact, and therefore ensure that we're delivering services that make sense for Albertans."

What I heard from Albertans in the last year – well, now more than a year; February 15 is when I resigned as Justice minister – was that they want to make sure that government is working smart and that it's working effectively and that it's investing in their families' future. When I think about the budget that we tabled two weeks ago, what we reflected in that budget was what Alberta families care about. They care about the future of their children. They care about education. They want to make sure that their children are going to have the quality of life that they hope all children in this province will have.

That's why, when we take a look at the approach that we need to take with respect to the Speech from the Throne and with respect to the budget and with respect to results-based budgeting, we will not fall into ideological doctrine that simply says that there's a bottom line that must be met because, Mr. Chair, the political discussion that has been part of public dialogue in the last two to three weeks has all been about ensuring that we can have fiscal discipline.

I'll tell you that fiscal discipline also includes investing in Albertans. If you take an ideological approach to it, Mr. Chair, you cut schools, and you cut hospitals. Then when you become a province of 6 million people, you don't have the infrastructure in place to allow for communities to thrive. We're not going to do that. We're going to make sure that we're putting the long-term planning in place that Albertans have asked us to put in place. These are not simplistic conversations. They're complicated conversations, and they're conversations that Albertans want us to have.

Mr. Anderson: For those keeping time at home, that was a six-minute answer to a three-minute question. I just would hope that she would try to keep the answers a little shorter than that as we go forward because I've got a whole 11 minutes left for this huge budget.

I guess I would question what this Premier – she talks a lot about that she doesn't like ideology. Okay. Fair enough. I guess what some people would call ideology, others would call principles. I know that as a father of four children, who I have a very active relationship with and worry about and save for every month in their little RESPs and so forth and do my best, put my \$50 a month into each of them – hopefully, it'll be more one day. One thing that I worry about as a father is a bunch of spendthrift liberals in the government spending my children's future and mortgaging my children's future to pay for their vote-buying schemes, including these estimates right here.

I get really tired of that, and I get tired of the excuse that I keep hearing from that side that if we show any kind of fiscal responsibility, that is somehow ideological, and we're shutting down hospitals and shutting down schools. That's something that I expect to hear from Barack Obama. It's something I'd hear from Jack Layton when he was still alive. It would be something I'd hear from current New Democrats in this House, from Michael Ignatieff, and from Stéphane Dion, but I sure as heck never thought I'd hear it from a Conservative Premier of Alberta. It's wrong.

What I want to hear from this Premier and what I'd like an answer on is: how in the heck are you going to do right by our kids, by my kids and my neighbours' kids, and all the folks in Airdrie and all the folks around Alberta who are concerned that you're spending them into oblivion, that you're piling up debt, that you're piling on deficits, and that you're giving us no way out? Please stop the fearmongering about cutting schools and cutting hospitals. You know full well that we spend 20 per cent more per person than the next closest province. Twenty per cent more.

An Hon. Member: We have 20 per cent more people who . . .

Mr. Anderson: No. It's per capita, hon. member. It's per capita. Per capita we spend 20 per cent more than the next closest province.

Why on earth can we not balance the budget at a hundred dollars a barrel for oil? Why do you keep mortgaging our children's future in your little fulsome discussions and your commitments to Albertans in your budget? Balance the budget. It's not ideological. It's principled. It's common sense. We've been doing it for over a decade here until the last four years. Will you commit to balancing the budget, Premier?

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Here's some fearmongering for you. "We're building debt." No, we're not. We have no debt. We have no debt, and we have no debt under a Progressive Conservative government. Our commitment is to the budget that we tabled two weeks ago, and in that budget we have very sensibly set out a set of priorities that matter to Albertans.

I'll give you some principles, Mr. Chair. We're going to support vulnerable Albertans, and we're going to educate all kids, not just the hon. member's kids. I don't stand in this Legislature and talk about the best interests of my child. I stand in this Legislature, as do my government colleagues, and talk about the best interests of all children. The best interest of all children so that every child in this province can excel to the best of their ability is to make sure that we're investing in public health care and that we're building schools and that we're educating kids.

I know from the work that we do on this side of the House in speaking to our constituents and to people in communities that they want to ensure that everyone in our communities is taken care of. I think that's something that all Albertans can be proud of, and it's certainly something that I'm prepared to go to an election on. That's why we're going to pass this budget before we go to the polls.

I will say that it is simplistic to stand up and say, "Balance the budget." Tell me what you're not going to spend on. The hon. member knows that there are new schools going into his communities, three new schools, I think, going into Airdrie.

4:20

An Hon. Member: Four.

Ms Redford: Great. Four. It's fantastic. That's how we invest in kids, and that's how we build community.

I'll tell you that when you have to make those choices – I don't know if the hon. member would make a decision to only build schools in his constituency, but when you're on the government side, you don't have that luxury, Mr. Chair. You don't get to arbitrarily decide. You have to make principled decisions and balance the interests of everyone in this province.

I do think it's interesting that when the hon. member stood up to ask a supplementary question, his first comment was that to a three-minute question he got a six-minute answer. I guess, Mr. Chair, he didn't listen to the answer because part of what I said

was that Albertans understand that these are complicated issues and that simplistic answers aren't going to work. In fact, whenever we've had those simplistic answers, that is when we've gotten into trouble. That's when we haven't had the facilities and the infrastructure that we needed to have in place for a growing population.

As a province of 3.7 million people we're going to have a lot of complicated issues. We're going to have big cities, with people that need supports. We're going to have people who want their children to get new sorts of education and new kinds of jobs that we can't even imagine yet. You know, the job of government is to think long term and to know that when we're investing and we're spending money on infrastructure and on social programs, that is what's going to allow the Alberta economy to continue to thrive.

What we've heard from Albertans is that they have confidence in the future of this province. They know that if we make smart decisions that are strategic and we actually understand the implication of bringing them together and having a long-term plan, that is when we'll be able to excel. When we take a look at how people in Alberta need to be supported and encouraged, we are going to, as we've seen in this budget that's tabled in this House, that we're talking about today, continue to invest in those programs that matter to kids and families. The hon. member refers to the fact that he's able to put away \$50 a month in an RESP for his children. That's great. There are a lot of families in this province that can't do that. I want to make sure and our government wants to make sure that all kids in this province are able to have the same opportunities.

So we're going to ensure as we move ahead that we continue to make decisions that are based on principles. We're not going to pick winners and losers. We're going to ensure that all children in this province can be excellent.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you. How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have a minute and 51 seconds.

Mr. Anderson: A minute and 51 seconds. Awesome. That's fantastic. I'm glad I have a minute and 51 seconds left to hear more of your complicated answers.

You know, I obviously, like everyone in this Legislature, I would hope, care very deeply about the future of our kids. My kids, actually, go to public school, so I care very deeply about that. I would like to make sure that we continue to build those schools for all Alberta children, but I would say that we've got to make sure that when we build these schools, we're doing them where there is the highest need and that there's no political interference.

I would ask the Premier – and I don't know. I mean, there's only a minute left. People in Alberta are hoping – were hoping; I think they're past the hope of it now – that you would bring in a new era of transparency in government. You had an opportunity to call a full public inquiry and show from your office that leadership of transparency from the top. You had the opportunity to call that public inquiry in October. You had another in December when you passed that wonderful piece of legislation that really gave you the power to do what you could do right now. We're almost at the end of February, and you still haven't called it.

People are asking. They want to know what has happened in health care, why these physicians have been intimidated, why they're scared, why our system is on the brink of collapse with

regard to health care. They haven't gotten the answer. Please, Premier, call the public inquiry. Call it tomorrow, and let's get started on this process.

The Chair: The 20 minutes for the Wildrose Party has ended.

Any other members wishing to speak? You have 10 minutes each. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: I'd love to chat some more.

The Chair: We haven't terminated two hours yet, so hon. member, you have the floor for 10 minutes. Do you still want to share 20 with the Premier?

Mr. Anderson: Nah. Can we do five, five, five, and five? Would that work?

The Chair: We have 10 minutes each to the maximum, and if you sit down, the Premier can answer.

Mr. Anderson: Can we do it five and five just to make sure that we actually get some time? Is that okay? No? Ten and 10?

The Chair: Ten and 10 or 20 combined.

Mr. Anderson: All right, all right. We'll do combined, then. She can talk for another 15 minutes while I talk for five.

Let's talk again about transparency. One of the things that is really bothering a lot of people in Alberta – and we just did a poll on this, actually. We polled roughly 42,000 Albertans on the question of Bill 24.

The Chair: Hon. member, excuse me. I have a note for an introduction of guests in the Speaker's gallery, so may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you. Thank you, hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Legislature a group of people from the north-central Alberta child and family services board that are here to meet with the MLAs and ministers. This is zone 7. I'd like to introduce them, and I'd ask them to stand as I call their name: co-chair Audrey Franklin from Ardmore, one of my constituents; co-chair Brian Broughton, Edson; Florence Gladue, Slave Lake; Wendy Huggan, Slave Lake; Caren Mueller, Vimy; Pat Palechuk, Smoky Lake; Claudette Sheremata, Athabasca; Trevor Thain, Whitecourt; Penny Vasseur from Bonnyville; and Elden Block, acting CEO. If you would please stand, we'll give you the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Executive Council

(continued)

The Chair: Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Anderson: Thanks. Welcome, to our guests.

I guess now that we have a little bit more time, with regard to leadership at the top and transparency and all those great things I really do want to know what goes on from your perspective in the Executive Council with regard to how you set policy. We're

spending a lot of money on it; that's for sure. Your budget went up in that regard for the Executive Council.

With regard to physician intimidation you've managed to run out the clock almost to the election period here, Premier. You made the promise during the PC leadership – was it June? – I think it was in June that if elected Premier, you would call a public inquiry into physician intimidation, et cetera. You were elected in October, the beginning of October. You said: no; we've got to wait to pass legislation, different legislation. So you waited, and we got into December, and you passed some piece of legislation that empowered the Health Quality Council to do the public inquiry.

4:30

Now we're at the end of February. Still no public inquiry. One has to be a little suspicious that, potentially, we're not going to have a public inquiry before the next election. I don't know if this is the policy coming out of the Executive Council office, if you feel that it's just too damaging to have such an inquiry, but I would ask: is it your plan to call the public inquiry immediately so that we have public hearings starting in the next couple of weeks, or are you going to delay and delay and delay until after the election before Albertans get any answers or hear any testimony in this public inquiry? Albertans would like a public inquiry, at least starting one, before they go to the polls, not after. Would that not be the transparent thing to do, Madam Premier?

The Chair: May I just interject here a bit before I recognize our Premier? We are talking about the estimates of the Executive Council, so please focus on that.

Now, Premier, if you wish to answer.

Ms Redford: Sure. Thanks, Mr. Chair. I find it quite amazing sometimes to stand in this House and to think about the experience that I have in this House and what I say in this House versus how very often this is reported back, somehow thinking that if it's created as revisionist history, it won't be on the record what this government stands for.

So the first thing I'll say is that we have been committed to an independent judicial inquiry with respect to health care from the first day that I was elected leader of this party and was sworn in as Premier. In fact, I was committed to it well before that. Mr. Chair, what we have said we needed to do is exactly what we've done. We needed to introduce legislation that would actually allow for an independent judicial inquiry. We passed that legislation in the fall.

The next thing that I said – and I said it during the debate with respect to the legislation – was that we then wanted to ensure that we had the report from the Health Quality Council on the work that they were doing because there were a number of allegations made with respect to the health care system, and it was important to ensure that that work was done and that we saw the results from that work before we started to launch into another process.

Today we have now received the Health Quality Council report, and as the minister of health has said in this House and as we said during the debate with respect to the legislation, we will review that report, and we will then use that legislation to call an independent judicial inquiry. Again, I was standing in this House two hours ago and was asked exactly this question and answered the question very specifically. There is no doubt that this will proceed and, in fact, receiving the report today will now allow us to review the report and to proceed with respect to the inquiry.

Now, I've heard people try to lecture on what that means with respect to timing. Here's the word: independent. We have made a

commitment to proceed. At the point that we proceed, there will be an independent inquiry that will be established under the legislation that was debated and passed in this House. That's something that Albertans can have complete confidence in. It is fully transparent. We have been fully transparent with our approach, and we'll continue to be, Mr. Chair. This is work that matters to Albertans, and to even insinuate that we as a government would change direction with respect to this I don't think is appropriate language for this House, and I also don't think it's appropriate language outside of the House.

We are committed to what we said we would do. We said that we would put this plan in place, and events are unfolding as they should. As we've said, we would ensure that we would follow.

Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: According to your Executive Council business plan, goal 1, government policy and planning are co-ordinated and effective. So let's talk about how that's happening with regard to your policy to have a health care inquiry. You have just said that you want an independent public inquiry. Great. Now, it's a little hard for us for you to stand there and say that it's fully independent since you're determining the terms of reference. Your own minister said that earlier: determining the terms of reference for the public inquiry. You are determining the timing of the public inquiry. Basically, you could tell them to examine anything. You could say: well, we're going to do an inquiry into the ER crisis, but we're going to leave out the intimidation scandal, and we're going to leave out some of these other things that have been alleged, the queue-jumping, for example. So that's not all that independent.

That will take leadership. You will have to show leadership at some point on this issue. It's on the side of your bus, I think: real-life leadership. So why don't you show some real-life leadership right now and commit not only to having a public inquiry on the intimidation scandal and the queue-jumping and the ER crisis but to call it now and to have it started within the next couple of weeks?

I mean, it didn't take long to turn around what happened with regard to the pay and perks committee. That got turned around quick by the Speaker. Surely the Premier of Alberta can make this happen in the next couple of weeks and get it started so that Albertans have some ability to know what has gone on in their health care system before the next election, because if you do not do it, if you do not call this inquiry before the next election, you are going to be painted not just by this caucus but by Albertans and, certainly, by other caucuses as being someone that says one thing and does another. You promised a public inquiry. You said it would be started before the election. Will you do that, Premier? Will you call the public inquiry into physician intimidation within the next couple of weeks so that before we go to the election . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I reminded you earlier that this time is for the estimates of the Executive Council.

Again, if the Premier wishes to speak, please reply.

Ms Redford: Sure. Thanks, Mr. Chair. You know, as I said when I got up to answer the question the last time, I'm absolutely amazed by the characterization and the revisionist history. We've been very clear with respect to what we will do. We actually passed legislation to ensure that this is done. So to suggest for some reason, for any reason, that we would go back on our word is entirely inappropriate.

You know, Mr. Chair, one of the things that's great about democracy and great about elections is that people get to decide

whom they trust. In the past four and a half months every single commitment that we have made as a government we have honoured.

What I would say, Mr. Chair, is that what we hear in the public debate is an awful lot of fearmongering and suggesting that things are different than they actually are and innuendo that somehow conduct isn't appropriate. Yet at the end of the day every single time the accusations come up short.

4:40

As we think about the next three months and we think about the really important discussions that Albertans are going to want to have with respect to the future of this province, we as government have every confidence that we can have conversations with our constituents and be proud of what we've committed to that's been positive, that's been constructive, that's been forward thinking, and that's been honest. That's going to be a really important time for Albertans because what Albertans want and what Albertans have said they expect is an honest conversation about the future of this province based on a government that is setting a direction and keeping its commitments.

I think that on this side of the House, Mr. Chair, we are all proud of the fact that through the throne speech, through the budget, through legislation that was passed last fall, and through Bill 1 as well as the Education Act in this session we have honoured our commitments. We haven't done it in isolation. We've done it based on consultations with Albertans, reflecting on the values and the issues that Albertans care about.

I believe that when these suggestions are made that things are other than they actually are, Albertans will have a decision to make with respect to what the dialogue should be, who is acting appropriately, who is consistent, and who they can trust, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. They sure will have that opportunity very soon.

So the non answer seems to be that there's not going to be a health inquiry before the next election. She won't answer it, so I'll move on.

Again referring to goal 1 of your Executive Council plan: government policy and planning are co-ordinated and effective. That's goal 1 of the Executive Council. We have said over and over again in this House and outside this House that under no circumstances will we as a Wildrose caucus ever support in the next four years a tax increase.

Now, is it this Executive Council's policy that should your targets not reach the projections that you're projecting – let's say they fall short a tad. Let's say it's \$85 a barrel or something like that, and you fall short a couple billion dollars or \$3 billion or \$4 billion or \$5 billion. Jack Mintz just today, for example, said that your projections are a fantasy. That's Jack Mintz today in the *National Post*. If that is true, if Jack Mintz, the well-respected economist, is correct and your projections are a fantasy and you come in below, will you increase Albertans' taxes to pay the difference, or will you not?

Will your Executive Council or will you as leader of the Executive Council unapologetically and without any of this waffling that we keep hearing say that your government, if re-elected, will not raise taxes or create new taxes? Will they, or will they not? Will you take the pledge to not raise Albertans' taxes? [interjections] That seems to get them riled up on the other side, doesn't it? Will you commit to not raising taxes for the next four

years regardless of what happens? Yes or no. Is that the policy of Executive Council, or are you too scared to answer it, like your caucus seems to be?

The Chair: Hon. Premier, if you wish.

Ms Redford: Absolutely, Mr. Chair. I'm looking at the projections, and what we see is oil at – what is it? – \$106 a barrel. Then I look at oil price benchmarking and the work that has been done by the Department of Finance on an ongoing basis that actually has numbers higher from Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, CIBC, Toronto-Dominion Bank, and RBC.

I'll tell you that the work that we do in government, Mr. Chair, is not based on speculation and innuendo. This hon. member knows better than that. This hon. member needs to understand that building a budget is a little more serious than theorizing about what he thinks may or may not be appropriate in the next two or three years.

Mr. Chair, we tabled a budget in this House that has reasonable economic forecasts, and quite frankly I think Albertans and, certainly, we as a government have an awful lot of confidence in turning to international financial institutions that have professionals and teams of people that are working on this on a daily basis, much more than the suggestion from this hon. member that he knows best. Frankly, I'm not going to rely on that hon. member's advice or projections when we're building a budget that's as important as the budget for the province of Alberta.

What we see in our projections is a significant surplus in the following years. In the two out-years there is no doubt that we are going to continue to be able to thrive and to succeed. Mr. Chair, the reason we're going to be able to do that is because Albertans understand that if we make the right decisions now, that are informed and smart and based on evidence, we will have put this province into a fiscal situation where discussions about raising taxes, which are not included anywhere in our fiscal plan, don't have to be part of the discussion.

Mr. Chair, we do know that the other thing that Albertans have said is that we need to be able to have a conversation about what our fiscal framework will be, and part of that must include how we define what revenues will be. I've said that simply because there is a reference in the throne speech to taxation should not mean to anyone that there's any anticipation of increasing taxes. As I've said, it's just as likely in that conversation that we could decide to eliminate small-business taxes. There is no doubt that if you want to have an intelligent conversation that's not ideological about the future of this province, you have to bring everything into the mix.

Today we hear of one expert who has commented with respect to budget projections. You know, I'll tell you, Mr. Chair, that that same expert three months ago was actually advocating for tax increases himself. So exactly which of that expert's comments does the hon. member want to rely on? Does he want to have an intelligent conversation where we think about integrated public policy planning, or does he want to do what he's doing now, which is simply pull the quotes, speculate, fearmonger, and not act responsibly with respect to the future fiscal forecast for this province?

The Chair: Hon. member, you have 21 seconds.

Mr. Anderson: Twenty-one seconds.

Well, I certainly hope that the projections are right, and I certainly hope that we have huge surpluses for a long time. If we have surpluses, that's fantastic. It's amazing to me that this Premier still will not commit to not raising taxes. That says it all.

The Chair: On my list, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's been kind of a little bit of an interesting afternoon so far. We've heard a lot of negative stuff going on in here today. That seems to amaze me because I honestly believe – and I guess everybody has been saying their opinions today, so I'll say mine – that we actually live in the very best province to work, to raise our families, to play. What more can we ask for? Really, when you read 90 per cent of the newspapers around, we are the envy of the world because of the good governing this province has had for the last 40 years. Today we have a Premier that's working very, very hard to do all the things that I just said. She wants to make health care the best, and our whole government wants to work on that. She wants to make education the best, and our whole government is working on that. Yet the other side just keeps talking negatively about those things.

4:50

Mr. Anderson: Relevance.

Mr. Ouellette: It was my turn, Mr. Chair.

I have to say that promoting our province as an energy leader, as an important global trading partner, and as a must-see tourist destination are all key initiatives of this government. I know that Executive Council's mission is to ensure effective strategic planning and policy co-ordination across government and to increase awareness of Alberta as an innovative global leader. On that note, Alberta's oil sands continue to attract international attention, and much of it is initiated by groups that are focusing on the negative. So I'd like to ask the Premier: what has the government been doing to increase understanding and awareness about the oil sands?

Ms Redford: Well, thank you for that question, hon. member. You know, the oil sands will be critical to our future. It's interesting today to see that so much of the discussion in terms of our long-term projections does rely on our nonrenewable resource revenue. What we know is that our customers are in the United States, they're in Asia, and that while we're not exporting an awful lot of resources to Europe, the public profile with respect to our resources is important in Europe. So the work that we need to do as a government, as ministers, for me as Premier, for all of us as MLAs is to work with our international offices and communicate effectively with respect to the real story around our environmental record and the fact that we as Albertans are true environmental stewards.

We need to talk not only about what our successes have been and the fact that we're one of the only jurisdictions in North America that has a tax on carbon, a price on carbon, that we're investing in a technology fund that's allowing for new technological innovation that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions with respect to the oil sands, that we've invested in carbon capture and storage, and that we're ensuring that we're doing upgrading with innovative technologies that also have an environmental impact, but we've done some very good work just in the past month with our Minister of Environment and Water and an announcement that I made jointly with Minister Oliver last week around joint monitoring and continuing to invest in research and innovation around tailings ponds and, again, around new technologies for extraction of the resources.

What we know from all of this is that when we tell that story through our emissaries around the world, through our international offices, through the work that's being done in Washington with our representative, Dave Bronconnier, and also with our representative in London, Jeff Sundquist, we're getting effective resonance. The hon. member is absolutely right. The reason we need to be able to talk about these issues and to really robustly

communicate them is because we do get such criticism from environmental groups.

You know, when I was in Washington, there was a reporter that asked me a question. It was right after the President had decided to delay the Keystone pipeline the first time. This reporter said: we were talking to this environmental group, and this environmental group said that they were really pleased with the Keystone decision because they knew that we in North America could now be off oil in two years. Well, it's a ridiculous proposition. As he was saying that to me, I looked out the window, and there was a person walking along the street. I thought, "That person doesn't honestly believe that the North American economy is going to be off oil in two years," nor, Mr. Chair, would I suspect that they want to be off oil in two years.

So when we're having a conversation with respect to what our environmental record has been and how we need to communicate that, a really important part is to be able to say, "Let's know who our critics are, and let's ensure that everyone understands what their political motivation is," because that's an absurd proposition. If we have environmental groups that have that as their starting base, I don't think that most people in Canada and in the United States would presume that it's possible to have a sensible discussion with those people, Mr. Chair.

When I think about the number of applications, the number of interventions that are being made at the National Energy Board with respect to Gateway, it's important for us to talk about what the motivation is for many of these interventions. Now, there are certainly people intervening that are passionately committed to environmental sustainability, just as we are as Albertans, and we need to be able to talk about what we want for better environmental outcomes.

However, we know as a province and we know as a government that when we talk about these issues, we are completely transparent with respect to what our objectives are, that we want to ensure that we're balancing environmental sustainability and that we're encouraging economic development. Other interests aren't always held to the same scrutiny. So an important part of what we need to do through Executive Council is ensure that we're having real conversations with decision-makers and with average citizens in North America about what motivations are in place around environmental activists.

We have some fantastic organizations that care an awful lot about environmental sustainability, and very often we can find areas of mutual interest to agree on. We can work with stakeholders and industry who are working with organizations like the Pembina Institute on what sustainable energy can look like in the future. That's a really important conversation for us to have because it's not only about our existing resources; it's also about talking about what an energy economy looks like in Alberta that allows us all to feel proud of what we have.

We do need to ensure that we're greening the transmission grid. We need to make sure that renewables and sustainables are part of what we're doing with respect to an energy economy, and those are investments that Albertans are prepared to consider. Our job as government has to be to introduce the policy choices that allow Albertans to make those decisions, and part of that also impacts what we're able to do with respect to greenhouse gases.

As we move ahead, we know that we can have tremendous success in talking about our record, communicating that we'll continue to do better, developing new technologies, and talking about who we are as Albertans and why we're proud to be Albertans. At the end of the day, Mr. Chair, I believe that that is

going to allow the oil sands to continue to be an important resource for our province.

Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Chair, I think that the Premier gave just some excellent answers. I'd like to add one more thing. The other side had been mentioning today also about how she enjoyed her plane rides or where she went. I would like to add that, you know, most Albertans I've talked to want to see the Premier at venues in other countries to open marketplaces – and I believe she would be the best cheerleader Alberta has – whether it be to represent our oil sands industry or our agricultural industry.

With that, she's done such a great job. I would like to move that the committee rise and report, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We've just terminated two hours of the committee, and we have a motion to rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

5:00

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration resolutions for the Department of Executive Council relating to the 2012-13 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 3

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 3, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012, for third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* on third reading of the bill.

Mr. Hehr: Certainly. I became very aware in the course of time that appropriations seem to happen on a regular basis and are needed by the government to do ongoing business and to continue with the day-to-day existence of providing what would likely be in most cases responsible government. I believe that it was the hon. Minister of Human Services, when he was talking about appropriations and the amounts that were needed and the like, saying that: well, we needed more money because of this reason and the number of people who had applied to a certain program, and denying those individuals the ability to get access to the help they need would have been unfair. I think that is an appropriate use of government appropriations and of a bill in that matter.

I see my hon. colleague. I'm glad he's not leaving at this point in time.

Appropriations are essentially a way that the government continues to go about running its business. Like I say, I think sometimes, at least from our side, some of the numbers reflected in appropriations could have been better planned for at the beginning of the budgetary year. In our view, there appear to be some instances when the government could have foreseen these circumstances arising and a need to go back to the table and to then again renegotiate their position or come forward and ask for more money from the hon. House. In those instances it becomes concerning to us that these mechanisms weren't planned for.

I think that if we look at that and if we can dovetail sort of to this year's budgeting process and whether there is going to be a need for appropriations, we can look then, if these budget numbers don't hold, which many pundits out there are saying will not hold – I, for one, hope they will. It means Alberta's doing well and that we're headed in the right direction, and we can go forward from there. But if they don't and we continue to have people who require government services, government assistance, provision of public health care, the provision of police services under the Solicitor General's faithful watch, then we'll need to continue to do those services and go on from there.

I see more than ever the need to appropriately budget. That has to be done and, to use a term that I've increasingly become confused at, to be fiscally conservative in doing so. I will be frank. I'm not sure what that word essentially means anymore. It's not just applied to this House but anywhere, frankly. When someone says, "I'm a fiscal conservative," I generally ask them, "Well, what the heck does that mean?" Does it mean that we only use the money that we have? I guess that could be one definition. Another definition might be: do we only use the money that's predictable and sustainable? Well, that might be another definition.

Another definition, one that I've sort of come to adopt, would be: does fiscally conservative mean that we are paying for what we use right now? By right now, what we as a society use right now. Are we paying what we owe for health care as a society? Are we paying what we owe for education as a society? Are we paying what we owe for environmental protection as a society? Because we, in the main, the people living, should be the ones paying for those services, not the future generations, not the people who are coming long after us.

So if you're really looking at a fiscal conservative, it can be, in my view, two ways. One, if you were to adopt my reasoning that we should pay for what we use, you would simply run those services that the dollars we bring in can afford and not necessarily augment it totally with fossil fuel allocations. I consider the 22 to 23 per cent of fossil fuel resources, or nonrenewable resources, that currently come into the coffers as being part of that equation that shouldn't be spent as a matter of course. It shouldn't be spent to pay today's bills because, in my view, that's unsustainable in the long term. You are actually letting people off the hook for paying for what they use, and I don't think that would be a conservative principle to adopt, that we should spend every last dime of fossil fuel resources that come into the coffers.

I guess that's where I was somewhat glad when I heard the throne speech. We were going to look at all revenue streams that come down the pike to get a handle on, what I believe, paying on what we use, a theory that I think is far more conservative than simply reducing taxes to the lowest level possible and then spending all this nonrenewable resource revenue, which after it's gone, it's gone.

It would be like a farmer who has 10 children, five girls and five boys. He loves them very much, and they grow up, and they have families. But he really doesn't like to ask them to contribute;

he likes being the father that they all know and like. You know, dad handles everything. But this guy can't pay for it all, so he sells off a piece of the family farm every year to pay today's bills so he doesn't have to ask his children to pay for some of the services they use. At the end of the day, you know, 25, 30 years later, that large family farm is now nothing – okay? – because he didn't ask people to pay as they go, to contribute to what they were using on the farm. That to me is not conservative. It would have been much more conservative to ask these children to pay for some of the things that were utilized on the farm. Then the farmer wouldn't have had to sell off piece by piece the family farm. That to me is a lot more conservative.

5:10

I use that parable – I don't know if parable is correct but Aesop's fable or something to that effect – to say that what we've done in the last 25 years is essentially said that we are going to spend every last dime of the fossil fuel resources that come into the public purse. In my view the analogy is the same as the farmer selling off pieces of the family farm one at a time to pay today's bills. Some day the farm runs out. Some day the oil sands run out. To me that wouldn't be a very conservative principle to go by.

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

Those are my thoughts on appropriations. I wasn't sure what I was going to talk about, but I'm glad I got a chance to speak on appropriations in third reading. I know that maybe someone else would like to speak on appropriations and go from there; otherwise, we're going to revert to business and go from there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other speakers to the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012, Bill 3? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've spoken a couple of times on different aspects of Bill 3. It is a frustrating process watching how we burn through money here in this Legislature. I mean, there's always an excuse for everything. Some of these things, you know, obviously, we need to spend money on, but I do find it amazing how this government thinks that they're fiscally responsible. I find it amazing.

I'll just give you some brief facts. This is from today, actually. It's actually from the fiscal reference tables from the Department of Finance for Canada in 2011. This is what was said. They compare two of the biggest spending provinces in the country. The biggest spending province is Alberta; second-biggest is Ontario. They do the comparison.

Did you know, Mr. Speaker, that program spending per capita, program spending per person, is \$10,055 in Alberta and \$8,300 in Ontario? Almost 20 per cent more here in Alberta than in Liberal tax-and-spend Ontario. Total revenues per capita in Alberta, \$9,235 per person; in Ontario, \$7,975 per person. Of course, Ontario is the second-biggest spender. This is Dalton McGuinty we're talking about. Growth in total spending in the last five years – five years' total spending increase – in Alberta, a 41.5 per cent spending increase. Three of those years were tough years or at least two of them anyway were kind of either in a recession or, you know, in a quasi-recession. Forty-one per cent. Now, that's tightening the old belt, eh? Excellent. In Ontario it was 34 per cent by contrast. Still awful.

The deficit per capita in Alberta is \$900 per person. That's the deficit for 2010-11. In Ontario it's about \$1,000 so just a very

small difference there. Then the debt per capita – and I remember that the Premier earlier today was talking about how Alberta doesn't have any debt. Of course, that's incorrect. We have billions of dollars in unfunded liabilities, direct borrowing for capital projects, and all sorts of debt that's on the balance sheets. Anybody can take a look at it at any time. Clearly, Alberta does have debt, more than it had five years ago as well, when it was basically paid off and we didn't have half of the liabilities that we do now.

In Alberta we have \$4,869 per man, woman, and child in debt, not deficit but debt. That's according to Statistics Canada. I guess Statistics Canada may be lying, but I hope not. [interjection] Well, that's why I'm quoting Statistics Canada, since you feel that way, hon. member.

Then in Ontario it's \$16,000 in debt per capita. They do have four times more debt per person than we do here, well, actually closer to three times.

This government has absolutely not a leg to stand on when it says that it is fiscally responsible, when it starts talking about the need to balance and blah, blah, blah. All that stuff: it's baloney. Until they get their fiscal house in order and until they get their priorities straightened out and the ability to distinguish between needs versus wants and priorities versus those things that can wait, they are putting the financial future of our children and grandchildren in jeopardy. They're certainly not living up to our potential. Hopefully, we could do a little bit better than terrible. Maybe we could try to excel in how we manage our finances. You cannot possibly give one statistic that shows that we are managing our finances given the riches that we have in this province.

As Jack Mintz said today in his report about Alberta, Alberta, Ontario are both mismanaged and profligate.

One province is bigger in population and slimmer in wealth. The other is smaller and fatter, referring to Alberta.

Ontario and Alberta may seem very different, but they do share one attribute: Their governments spend well beyond their capacity.

This month, we have seen the release of the Drummond report for Ontario and the Alberta budget. Both governments could use a crash diet.

The Drummond report is all about reality. Ontario must curtail spending.

It talks about the need for Ontario to quit spending like drunken sailors.

Then he goes on:

The Alberta budget is based on fantasy.

This is Jack Mintz.

Using optimistic forecasts for oil prices averaged well in excess of US\$100 per barrel, the government expects a return to surplus by 2013-14, even though its "rainy day" fund to avoid cash deficits is plummeting a further \$3.7 billion just this year.

How could each of these provincial governments so mismanage their finances over the years? In Alberta, riches have spoiled fiscal discipline. Since 2005, spending has grown massively by 41.5% despite the major global recession of 2008-09. True, Alberta's inflation and population growth puts pressure on spending, but this is not an excuse. Even after adjusting for inflation and population growth, Alberta's real per-capita spending has grown by 11%,

in excess of that inflation plus population growth. That is more than the private-sector productivity growth.

Alberta's profligacy comes of public-sector wage costs escalating far above the national average. In 2000, the differences in wages per employee were little different between Alberta and the rest of Canada.

This is interesting. When Ralph was at his best, I would say, roughly in the area of 2000, he had really turned this province around. The engine of the economy was roaring. We were getting very close to paying off our debt, which would be done a few years subsequent to that. In 2000, at that time, public-sector wages in Alberta were about the same, a little higher but about the same, as in the rest of Canada.

By 2010, Alberta government employees were being paid vastly more, roughly \$30,000 per employee more than the rest of Canada. Think about that. This is why we're in this situation to pass the supplementary supply act, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

He goes on to say:

Not only does the province lack a good fiscal plan, it also lacks a savings plan. The province continues to run down its financial assets, whose [net] worth is expected to be \$15 billion by the end [of 2012].

It was over \$20 billion not such a short time ago.

Alberta is endowed with vast oil and gas resources that have been generally sold off to support current public consumption. Its total per-capita revenues are over \$9,000, but more than a quarter of that comes from non-renewable resource revenues. By selling off its assets in the ground while depleting its net financial and capital assets, the province is reducing its wealth . . .

Get this number, Mr. Speaker. Wait for it. You're going to love this number.

. . . by about \$13 billion a year.

If they had just kept their spending to inflation plus population growth, invested the rest in the heritage fund, the savings fund, et cetera, we would be taking in this year, just off interest and all these other things, \$13 billion a year more. Now, that would solve our deficit issue right now, wouldn't it, without having to cut any services.

Without better fiscal planning, the Alberta government has aggravated economic cycles in the past decade by jumping up spending in the good times and pulling back in bad times. This not only hurts Albertans but also other Canadians, since Alberta is a major player in investment markets.

Now, it then goes on to talk about Ontario's sad story, and it is a sad story, a very sad story, and it has a lesson in it for us. Twenty years ago Ontario was the centre – well, in Toronto they felt they were the centre of the universe, but surely they were the economic engine of the country, of all of Canada. Twenty years ago they had a very healthy automotive industry. Think about the '90s and how much money was coming in just from the automotive industry, with GM and Ford and all of those plants over there in Ontario just absolutely humming. It was the economic engine.

Now here we are, and according to this article and according to other published reports Ontario is literally on the brink of financial collapse. Their credit rating is going to be significantly downgraded if they do not get their finances in order. So when we're thinking about passing these bills, Mr. Speaker, we need to think about the fact that right now Alberta is on the path to becoming Ontario. That's what we're on the path to. Now, maybe this new Premier has a plan – I wish she would share it before the election – to get us back on the path to being exceptional again. Maybe she's got that plan somewhere up there, and she just wants to keep it a secret until whenever, after the election, and I hope that's the case.

But if she continues down the road that this government has gone down over the last five years in particular but also over the last couple of years of the Klein years, unfortunately, we are going to be

in a very bad place. We will not be the economic engine of Canada anymore. We've got to get this province of ours and our budget straightened out.

It's not about being crass. The Premier always says: it's not just about the bottom line. Well, that's true. It's not just about the bottom line, but it is also about the bottom line. You cannot be a fiscally conservative, responsible government if you refuse to look at the bottom line and use social programs and social spending as an excuse to ignore the bottom line. One day guess what happens? We run out of money. Oil is at \$60 a barrel all of a sudden because of new technologies and so forth, and then what do we do? How do we balance our budget then?

If we don't get ourselves straightened out, Mr. Speaker, we are going to have a lot of 'splainin' to do to our grandchildren and to our children, and that's not a conversation that I think any of us in this Chamber want to have and want to have to defend.

There's still time. We probably have another boom here coming up in the next 10 years. Oil probably won't go down too, too much. It won't go into the \$30 range for at least another few years, anyway. But we know how volatile the price of oil is, so let's plan now. Let's stop throwing money around like it's paper, and let's control our spending, get our balanced budget, start putting away some of our resource revenues into our savings plan so that we can turn what is a sea of nonrenewable resources into a mountain of permanent investment capital, replenishing and growing with interest each and every year and every single year enriching the opportunities of Albertans for generations to come, Mr. Speaker.

That is what I hope this Premier will eventually come up with before the election, and if she doesn't, I know of a very solid party that would be willing to pick up the mantle and do it for her if she doesn't feel the need to do it. We are prepared to do so, and we'll be taking that message to Albertans over the next several months.

With that, I've spoken to Bill 3. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, section 29(2)(a) is available should anybody wish to question the hon. member who just spoke or make comment on the speech. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yeah. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere about a few areas that you didn't maybe go into detail on. You know, each year as we go back to supplementary, I find it very frustrating that we can't ever stay within the constraint of a budget year after year. We have 10 ministries that have come forward here. Do you have any comment on each of the individual ministries and where we're spending this money and why we need to go to supplementary supply and why they couldn't stay within the budget in those areas? I'm just wanting your knowledge on whether you have anything specific there as to why we're running these deficits.

Thank you.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Hancock: You mean given that you just gave a 15-minute speech and didn't touch on anything in the bill? Is that what you mean?

Mr. Anderson: That's just unfair. I think that this touched on a lot in the bill. Third reading is about looking forward and how we can avoid these types of bills in the future, the need for these bills, Minister.

You know, there's always an excuse for all of these things, isn't there? One of the big ones is wage increases for the judges under

the Ministry of Justice. Now, we all want good judges, and we all want to make sure that they're fairly paid. But I add, again, that we don't seem to understand that when the average person looks at the increase that the judges are getting, just like they did when the politicians gave themselves a 30 per cent pay raise, when the average person sees the elites getting that kind of a pay raise, it sets a tone. I hope we can all agree that it sets a tone.

It's just like anything else. The CEO of any organization sets the tone for the organization. You look at the incredible success of Apple, and you think: why were they so successful? One of the reasons – there are many reasons – is because Steve Jobs set a tone as the CEO. It was a tone of innovation. It was a tone of: "There are no walls here. No one is going to be in a box. We're going to think outside the box. All ideas and creative solutions are going to be embraced. We're going to look at those new things, and we're going to spend money on those new things, being innovative and so forth." And because of that, he set the tone for his company. Then, of course, there are other companies that don't set such a good tone, and they fail.

It should be the same in the province. The people that lead us – our politicians, our Premier, the front bench, all of the MLAs in the Assembly, the lawyers, the judges, the doctors, everybody – should make sure that when we give ourselves these salary raises or when our salaries are adjusted, we're setting a responsible tone. I mean, it's just like the opposition leader says. It is pretty hard to look a worker in the eye who has been cleaning hospital floors, with all the awful things that get on hospital floors, and say: "You know what? We can't afford a 3 per cent increase or an inflationary increase this year. Sorry. We've got to tighten our belts."

5:30

It's hard to ask them to make that concession, so to speak, or to agree to that when the first order of business after the last election for the cabinet that was then in existence, including this Premier, who was in that cabinet, was to give themselves a 30 per cent raise. It's pretty hard to then go to the worker who's cleaning the vomit off the floor and say: "You know what? We've got to cut back. We've got to tighten our belts." There's no fiscal leadership. There's a disconnect, and people see it. So when the government goes in and negotiates with these unions for a fair deal, the union leaders take a look and say: "Well, good grief. You gave yourselves a 30 per cent raise three years ago. What do you mean you only want to give us zero per cent this year and 1 per cent next year or 2 per cent next year? What are you talking about?" And you know what? They have every right to say that.

Now, if we had been the example and had made it our first business when I was over on that side and the PC government would have made it their business to say, "You know what; we're only going to increase our salaries by the rate of inflation; we're not even going to do average weekly wage index, just inflation," and then you go to the bargaining table with the teachers and you go to the bargaining table with the workers, it's a much easier process.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on Bill 3.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand and, I guess, share a few of my thoughts on Bill 3 and the disappointment Albertans relate to me when I'm out talking to them in various places and visiting them in their homes that this government has failed for the last five years to be able to balance its budget despite record revenue. I was just looking this afternoon

at the revenue from our resource industry – oil, gas, bitumen, land sales – and over the last seven years I don't believe it has dropped below \$8.9 billion. It has been as high as \$14 billion, down to \$8.6 billion. It has been a landslide of revenue for this government, yet every year this government fails to be able to meet its budgetary expenses.

I can see in a few areas, perhaps in Human Services, that we've had some tragedies and need to address them, perhaps in Municipal Affairs, again, where we've had some real natural disasters. Those are areas that, you know, we can't always predict, but again in good budgeting you would set aside that \$300 million for those different areas where we might need it.

To go through and look at some of them, I want to start off with the first one for the Legislative Assembly of \$3.1 million. I sat on the committee when our Chief Electoral Officer came in to make his presentation requiring this extra amount of money. Mr. Speaker, this wouldn't even be in the appropriation if this government and the Premier would keep their word on having a set election date. The whole reason he came in with the cost and the expense, the Chief Electoral Officer, is because he has to be prepared because tomorrow or Monday this Premier could, if she decides to, call an election. It's his responsibility to have places ready to rent, people ready to go to work because this Premier broke her promise on setting a fixed election date.

So we have an extra \$3.1 million here in supplementary supply because the Chief Electoral Officer needs to be ready in case this Premier all of a sudden wakes up from a nightmare and thinks, "I've got to go to the polls now," and off we go. Very disappointing that this Premier wouldn't keep her word, give a date. The first one here in the appropriation bill wouldn't be in here if we knew it was the 15th of June, the 30th of April, whatever it is. But here we are having to spend extra money, and the frustration of people trying to be prepared and ready. Why? Because this government fails to plan. This government fails to be transparent. This government fails to be open with the people of Alberta. This government and this Premier fail to keep a promise. Very disappointing.

Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations needs an extra, if we flip through and go to that in the book – excuse me. I've got the wrong page flagged here. But we can go through line item after line item and ask why the government has failed to be able to properly allocate its funds, or to be even more impressive, Mr. Speaker, actually come in under budget. Why is this such an impossibility for this government? Here it is. Intergovernmental relations. The supplementary amount of \$2 million is requested together with \$500,000 made available from lower than budgeted expenses in other programs, to provide an increase of \$2.5 million to the First Nations development fund.

I'm not saying that the development fund isn't great and that we don't need to have it, but the question is: why can't we budget for these things a year in advance? Why is it that with 30 days left, this government comes in and says: "We need this money. We need \$118 million for the First Nations development fund"? Well, what is it that it's actually presenting? We don't know. It would be very nice if these things actually came with line items to say what the contracts are for and what they're trying to achieve. It was another one of the promises. In her mandate letter the Premier said that they're going to be open and transparent. There's no transparency here, Mr. Speaker. There's no openness. It's line item budgets, and who knows what it's for?

We go to the next one. A supplementary amount of \$28 million is requested to provide funding for salary increases and pension plan enhancement for the Alberta Provincial Court judges and the

Court of Queen's Bench masters in chambers. Again, a line item, not enough information there to be able to determine whether this government failed to budget properly or whether they were just unaware.

As my colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere has pointed out so many times, the whole budgeting process, in my opinion and for many people across this province, comes from the first act that this government did, the Premier included, to go into Members' Services and give themselves a nice big hefty wage and then to turn around to the rest of Albertans and say, "Look at what a wonderful job we're doing; we are wonderful; pay us top dollar," and not be able to see the domino effect of what that leadership actually causes. Leadership in that they lead, they take significant raises, and then those behind want to follow and ask for significant raises. They've lost all credibility to be able to deal with any of our numerous public servants because of what they gave themselves. In most Albertans' eyes they weren't doing a very good job, Mr. Speaker. They're actually appalled at the jobs they were doing in many cases and very upset with the way they pushed forward and took those.

Municipal Affairs: \$17 million, I believe, is requested together with \$523,000 made available from lower than budgeted expenses in other programs, to provide \$18 million for the government-wide response to the wildfire in the town of Slave Lake and surrounding communities. Here, Mr. Speaker, is a case of an unforeseen tragedy needing some money. We understand that, but again my question is: why don't we have that fund in place so that we don't have to go through supplementary supply?

It's disappointing as we go through case by case. Seniors supplementary estimate: \$10 million. The amount of \$10 million is requested together with another million made available from lower than budgeted expenses in the affordable supportive living initiative program, to provide \$6 million for the costs related to higher caseload growth for financial assistance to assured income for the severely handicapped. There have been many, many speakers here that have talked about the need for putting them first. It's kind of interesting, like I say, that they got this huge wage increase themselves, yet we've waited four years before we've finally seen those on AISH and PDD receive that increase. Four years they had to wait before they got a significant increase, when this government, again, put themselves first and said they needed it. Why can't they plan and budget for these things?

5:40

Another one of the concerns that I have because of the total amount that they're asking for – it's interesting that this Premier was propelled to the front, I believe, largely because of a \$107 million promise that she made with just two weeks left in the leadership campaign. She went to Albertans and said, "We'll restore the \$107 million," which the Wildrose spoke against taking from the teachers because they'd signed contracts. I mean, the current Finance minister is the one who gave them such a lucrative contract five years ago, and then they didn't want to keep it. [interjection] I'm getting the House leader over there, Mr. Speaker, chattering, saying that that isn't so. It absolutely is so.

She also promised that they would take that \$107 million from in-year savings. If we had \$107 million of in-year savings, why are we even coming to supplementary supply?

It's interesting, too, to even go back to her Bill 1, Results-based Budgeting Act. This is the result of poor budgeting. This is the result of the sky is the limit. We have record revenue, yet we have a bigger problem; we have record spending. They're unable to control it. They refuse to control it. It's kind of interesting, you

know. Even those over there that believe in Keynesian economics of spending when times are tough miss the other half of the time. We want the government to be able to keep spending when times are tough, but they spend even more when times are good. The only limit that they actually had, Mr. Speaker – and I often kind of chuckle at this. It's like giving a child a thousand dollars and saying, "You have a half-hour to spend it, but you have to spend it at a dollar store." Well, it's not too far into the spending when the child realizes that, "Well, there are so many other things that I want." They'd be happy to save and go over there, but: "No. These are the parameters that you're in. You've got a thousand dollars. Spend it in the next half-hour at a dollar store."

That's what this government does. It has revenue coming in, and it says: "We've got to spend it. It's burning a hole in our pocket. We can't put it into savings if we can spend it." We look at some of those record revenue years. Thank heaven there wasn't the capacity out there for them to spend any more and they were actually forced to walk out of that dollar store and put some into our sustainability fund. Gratefully, that is sustaining us at this point so that we don't have an actual debt. We just have cash deficits accumulating now to, I think, \$15.8 billion over the last five years.

Mr. Speaker, as we look through this, it's very disappointing that this government comes year after year with its supplementary supply. Other than one or two ministries where there's been some action that's happened that was, you know, unexpected, that needed some extra funds, we have to come to this. For a Premier who says that she's going to be fiscally responsible, she certainly has not demonstrated in any areas some proper results-based budgeting. It's always next year. You know, the rainbow is just over the next hill. They don't seem to realize that that rainbow is a lot farther away than that. In their budget and in their revenue that they're projecting, it's just next year now. After five years this is the fifth "Next year the revenue is going to be here, and we're going to be back in the boom years again, so why do we need to worry about balancing the budget?"

It's interesting that we continue to repeat this day after day, year after year not being able to control our spending. It's a poor example. It's a poor example to Albertans. It's a poor example to all of our public servants that work hard to create a better Alberta. The lead is poor. The number one message that this government and this Premier have sent out to all of the working people in Alberta is that raises are in order. "We deserve them; we'll restrain yours to a very limited amount." They're unable to look at the domino effect that a 2 or 3 per cent raise has when it comes to the teachers, the nurses, the doctors, the policemen. [interjections] No raise? The Government House Leader says that he's had no raise in five years. He doesn't remember his 30 per cent raise, or maybe he was just so heavy at the trough, he couldn't consume any more if he wanted to.

It's quite interesting, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 3, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012 . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but it's a quarter to 6, and Standing Order 64(5) requires the chair to call the question on any appropriation bill standing on the Order Paper for third reading, so I'll do my duty.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2 Education Act

[Debate adjourned February 16: Mr. Boutilier speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek on Bill 2, Education Act.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and actually talk about Bill 2, the Education Act. I think it's something that has been long in coming. I know that when I was on that side of the House, we talked about the Education Act. I think what's happening right now is that as this bill was tabled in the Legislature, I think a week ago, this is where we're starting to get questions from people, Albertans and constituents, in regard to some of the things that they would like to see in the Education Act and what they think is important. Hopefully, during the debate we'll be able to ask the minister on that.

I know the Government House Leader was very passionate about the Education Act. I know that when I was with the government and I brought forward my bullying bill, which was defeated in the Legislature, the minister at the time, from Edmonton-Whitemud I think it was – I want to make sure I have the right minister – assured me that the bullying bill, as my private member's bill, would be incorporated within the Education Act.

It's nice to see that. I think he realized, as well as many of the people in the school system when we talk about bullying, the seriousness of the bullying. As the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and as someone who did bring the private member's bill forward in regard to bullying in school, some of that has been incorporated in the act, and that's nice to see. As we go through, I'm going to go back to my private member's bill, and I'm going to look at the section in the act in regard to bullying and find out exactly what has been incorporated and what hasn't been incorporated.

What I always find fascinating when I read a bill – Mr. Speaker, this is a huge bill; it's 186 pages. I'm not the critic – the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is the critic on Education – so I haven't had time myself as a member of the Wildrose to go through this bill line by line to find out some of the things that . . . [interjection] I have the Government House Leader, once again, yelling across the floor at me, and I thought I was very kind to him when I was bringing him up with regard to his passion when he was the Education minister. I guess I find it somewhat questionable or frustrating why he'd be yelling at me because I actually was very nice and complimentary to him in regard to when he was the Education minister and fulfilling what I consider to be a pretty big promise in regard to incorporating my private member's bill on bullying into the Education Act.

5:50

When we're looking at, as I said, a 186-page piece of legislation, you always start with the preamble. I always find fascination with the preamble. The vision and principles and values of the education system are so much common sense, yet we feel the need to put this in a piece of legislation.

We have a government that has had the Education Act forever. You would think that all of the things that are in the preamble, when you talk about "whereas education inspires students to discover and pursue their aspirations and interests and cultivates a love of learning and the desire to be lifelong learners" – well, Mr. Speaker, my boys are way past the school age. They were in the public school system. That was an aspiration, quite frankly, when they were in the school system. I'm not going to age myself. I can bet that if we go back in history to when I was in school – and that's a long time ago – that was the aspiration of the teachers at that particular time that were teaching us. I remember, quite frankly, some very, very passionate teachers that were inspiring me when I was in school and deciding what I wanted to do when I

grew up. I have to say just on that that I don't remember anyone, when I was in school, quite frankly, inspiring me to choose the role of a politician. But, you know, I guess that was then, and this is now.

We talk about: "The role of education is to develop engaged thinkers who think critically and creatively, and ethical citizens who demonstrate respect, teamwork and democratic ideals, and who work with an entrepreneurial spirit to face challenges." And it goes on and on. All of this is what we should have been doing and what we have been doing, so I wonder, when you see all of these whereas incorporated in regard to a piece of legislation, what exactly the government was doing previously or what they thought they were doing in the past.

I want to talk about some of the interpretations in the act. They talk about the attendance board and the attendance officer. I know that one of the priorities for us is how to keep children in school and, I guess, as it says in section 8(1), enforcing school attendance. We've had that. I know that we've talked about that in the past when we've talked about: how do we engage our children and keep them in the school system?

Now we've got the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security doing his famous hand signals in the Legislature and his famous grin. We wonder about the Solicitor General, who should be setting an example in his particular position, making faces at the opposition and hand gestures. It goes back to yesterday, when he thought he was so smart in tabling a letter in the Legislature in regard to a very small quote about what our leader said in regard to the provincial gun registry. That was the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security misleading Albertans.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Denis: A point of order, Mr. Speaker, arising out of 23(h), (i), and (j) but also *Beauchesne's* 489. This member has used the word "misleading," which is unparliamentary language. I would ask that she apologize to this Chamber, being the honourable woman that she is.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere on the point of order, then.

Mr. Anderson: On the point of order. In response, I think the hon. member was just mentioning that, obviously, there was some misleading language in that tabling. Of course, the leader of the Wildrose had said that she wanted to make sure that criminals who had committed gun crimes were registered, and he said that that meant she was promoting the gun registry. I thought it was weird that the Solicitor General doesn't want to register criminals who have used guns in crimes. I just think that's weird.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I think our Speaker earlier addressed us about the words that are used in the House. I think we'll just focus on the words being used here, not the content of it. Please refrain from those words. You were advised by the Speaker about using the word "misleading" and so on. It has been explained before.

Hon. member, listen. It has been explained before, so now please stay on Bill 2, the Education Act. Don't go venturing further out. Then we'll have no points of order, and everything should be great. Go ahead.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to stay on Bill 2, actually, once we get the hand gestures and the facial expressions – oh, there he goes again, the Solicitor General of the province. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has the floor. Please continue on Bill 2.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm sure his constituents and the constituents in Calgary-Egmont and, quite frankly, Albertans would love to know that we have a minister of the Crown providing hand gestures and his goofy smile when he doesn't like what's being said.

Anyhow, having said that, I would like to continue on – and there he goes again.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, address the chair.

Mrs. Forsyth: You know, it's too bad that we did not have a camera in regard to what's happening in this Legislature because, quite frankly, Albertans would be appalled.

On the bill, talking about part 1, the access to education and the right of access to education, I don't think anybody can argue with the fact that every person – and it talks about: six years old and younger than 21 who is a resident.

There are things that we like in this bill. We also like the idea of the authority of the schools, the charter schools, and the importance of public education in this province. We like the idea of the religious and patriotic instructions that are exercised.

A lot of the things that are incorporated in the bill are part of the policies that we support under the Wildrose. We think it's important that every student has the right to an education, and that's incorporated in the bill. The government in the bill talks about the parents having the right and the responsibility to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children. Now, that's an interesting comment because then we go into some of the controversy that we've had – the particular bill escapes me – on human rights and having the right that if there is an educational class being taught, as a parent I have the right to withdraw my child from that particular class. I think that truly is something that is up to the parent. I don't think there is anything wrong with the fact that if a parent decides that their particular child – let's say that they're taking a sex education class – isn't ready for that or they feel that they would rather teach the child themselves about sex education, that really is up to a parent's choice.

I have to tell you that when my kids were in school, I felt that it was my right as a parent, and I think today it's very similar to parents having the ability to have the right to choose. We hear a lot about the fact that – and we see some of the things that are going on across the province and, particularly, in B.C., I think, where they've indicated that it's mandatory that a child stays in the classroom. I think that – and I've repeated this – it really, truly is up to a parent to make those decisions.

I understand we're running out of time, and you're going to stand up, Mr. Speaker, so I'll sit down.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, it's 6 o'clock, so the chair shall now just inform all hon. members that the policy field committees will reconvene at 6:30 p.m. in committee rooms A and B for consideration of the main estimates of the Department of Culture and Community Services and the Department of Energy.

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

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