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The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

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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.

Thursday, March 15, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. As we conclude this week's deliberations and return to our constituencies, we pray that we will be renewed and strengthened in our commitment to better serve our constituency and all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, do you have an introduction?

Ms Blakeman: I do, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Blakeman: You could tell how excited I was when you called upon me, I know.

Once again I am very proud to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose. Now, you know that everything good happens in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, except for what happens in Edmonton-Calder. I'm very pleased that the court holds so many activities in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I'm going to do a member's statement later, but I would like to introduce them and have them rise when I mention their names so that you can see them in all their glory. We have two board members with us today from the court, Kari Sorensen and Michelle Pederson. Imperial Grand Duke XXXVI, Yeust Bobb, I believe is here; indeed, he is. Imperial Grand Duchess XXXVI, Clara T, is coming; Imperial Crown Prince XXXVI, Stiffy Steele; His Majesty Emperor XXXV, L.J. Steele – hi, L.J. – and Her Majesty Empress XXXIII and Empress Regent XXXVI, Marni Gras.

Please join me in welcoming these wonderful people to our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through to all members of the Assembly a group of parents and students from the Wetaskiwin and Camrose home-schools. This bright young group of students and their parents are here today to see the Legislature Building and to take in the history of the building and also, of course, to observe question period. I know they're going to have wonderful time here. I'm a little bit nervous, though, because they've told me they're coming up to have a look at my office afterward, so as we speak my staff is scrambling to clean it up. They are seated here in the gallery, and I'd ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Hayden: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and, of course, through you to all members of the Assembly a group of very bright young

individuals who have travelled here today. One of the students told me they left really early, at about 6 o'clock, and travelled here from Morrin, Alberta, which, of course, is in my constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. Today we have with us 18 grade 6 students from the Morrin school. They're seated in the members' gallery, and they're accompanied by their teacher and parent helpers. I had an opportunity to chat with them today, and I also had an opportunity to be at their school last week as we looked at the modernization that's taking place. Today as I chatted with them, they had unbelievable questions, I dare speculate maybe the best that I will have had heard today. I'd now ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First off, I would like to introduce to you and through you four residents of my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. Prior to question period I met with Tracey Marshall Craig, Kathy Murphy, and her two young children, Ava and Finn Murphy. Tracey is the chair of the Summerside playground subcommittee, and Cathy is also a member of the subcommittee. These two women have worked tirelessly on the Summerside playground project. As you well know, lots of work goes on in new communities in developing playgrounds. At this time I would ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second introduction today is a group of students from Ellerslie campus, elementary and junior high school. These bright young students are here today to observe the proceedings of the House, and it is my pleasure to have them here. Joining them are Mr. Blair Faulkner, Mrs. Farhat Naqvi, Miss Amanda Pearce, and Mrs. Angela Sawula. At this time I would ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of very bright, very intelligent students from Talmud Torah School accompanied by their teacher, Ms Sherry Helland. I had the opportunity to have a brief chat with them. They really enjoyed the tour. Now I would like to ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year I have the honour and privilege of introducing to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Rotary exchange students. This year is no exception. Accompanying my guests today is Jack Clements, a long-time constituent of mine and a good friend. Jack is a member of the Edmonton downtown Rotary club and has served with this Rotary club and our community for many years. Accompanying Jack are three exceptional Rotary exchange students.

Anna-Marie Robertson from Edmonton will be an exchange student to the Netherlands during the 2012-13 year. She's an only child with a single-parent mom and has a keen interest in international affairs and conflict resolution. She's very excited to be an ambassador for Edmonton and about all the learning to come. While she does not envy our MLA job, she does acknowledge its importance and is here today to learn more about the work that we do.

Saskia Dietrich comes from a little town close to Berlin, Germany. She has indicated that to go on this exchange was the best decision that she has ever made. She has met many people and made many friends and experienced many cultures. Her mother is a physical therapist and her dad is an engineer, and neither have been to Canada. Saskia indicated that the only thing that she misses is German chocolate.

Noora Savolainen comes from Raisio, Finland. She started figure skating when she was four years old and loves to watch hockey. Her father is an ice hockey coach for her brother's team. Mr. Speaker, I was able to show her the picture of Gretzky and me in my office after Gretzky's last game in Edmonton. She is also a lover of music, and she wants to learn more about our language and culture and share her Finnish culture and customs with us. Spending a year in Canada has allowed her to improve her English and make many friends.

Mr. Speaker, these are truly amazing students with many special talents. May Saskia and Noora have a rich and rewarding Alberta experience, and may Anna-Marie experience all there is to experience in the Netherlands and come back to Edmonton enriched and rewarded. My guests are in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and be rewarded with the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly a very good friend of mine and successor as the Progressive Conservative candidate for St. Albert, Steven Kahn. He is a long-time resident of St. Albert. He is very involved in the community and has participated in almost every sport you could imagine. He's managed a family software business with over 70 employees and has markets across Canada and, actually, internationally. Please welcome the next MLA for St. Albert, Steven Kahn. Please stand.

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

1:40

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House six members from the Little Red River board of education. They are in Edmonton for their conference, so I have invited them to come tour the Legislature, attend question period, and have a short visit with the Minister of Education. They are seated in the members' gallery. Please stand as I call your names: Mr. Dennis Laboucan, chairperson of the board; Marylou Grande, board member, Fox Lake; Alvina D'Or and Karen Tallcree, board members of Garden River; Tina Seeseequon, local board chairperson of John D'Or Prairie; and my friend of over 20 years, Mr. David Yu, who immigrated to Alberta, Canada, in the '80s from China. He received his master of education here in Alberta and has worked on various reserves and is currently the director of education for the Little Red River Cree Nation. I would like to ask the members of the House to extend their warmest welcome to our guests.

Ms Notley: Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of guests from the Battle River-Wainwright constituency. My guests are part of a group of about 30 landowners representing an organization called Concerned Neighbours in Partnership that wants to give people in their area a voice on ATCO's east Alberta transmission line. Together they collected hundreds of signatures from fellow Albertans who are

concerned about property and landowner rights, a petition which we'll be tabling today. I would now like to ask my guests to rise as I call their names: Deb Kirk, John Kirk, Marilyn Matthiessen, Midge Lambert, Bill Leithead, Marion Leithead, Denise Miller, and Dale Kroetsch. I would now ask the Assembly to join me in offering them the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very distinguished guest sitting in your gallery. He's the Hon. Jim Karygiannis, Member of Parliament for Scarborough-Agincourt in Ontario. He has served his constituents in the House of Commons since 1988 and currently acts as the Liberal Party critic for multiculturalism. Joining him is his assistant, Mr. Nikolaos Mantas.

Mr. Karygiannis is a strong advocate for social justice and human rights. He's rallied MPs to condemn acts of barbarism perpetrated against religious and cultural minorities all around the world. He's also well travelled, having served as an official election observer in Pakistan and several other countries. Mr. Karygiannis is often quoted as saying that RACE stands for respecting our neighbours, accepting our differences, celebrating our rich diversity, and embracing our heritage. Mr. Speaker, this is something that we do every day as MLAs in this House to make Alberta a welcoming place. Mr. Karygiannis, welcome. A great Canadian. I'd ask him and Mr. Mantas to rise to please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Health Care System Accomplishments

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this Assembly time is spent discussing the complex issues facing our public health care system. The work of building the health system is never done, particularly in improving the access to care. Action is being taken, and I'd like to highlight some of the recent accomplishments.

There are advancements in improving access to health care services right across the province. Forty primary care networks operate each day to serve Albertans' primary health care needs. Additional funding will be invested this year in primary care networks, and three family care client pilot projects will be rolled out later this month. Our seniors will receive expanded home-care services, more adult day programs, and a province-wide, 24-hour telephone helpline run by registered nurses.

Each year there are a thousand new continuing care spaces, to expand our system by 5,300 spaces by 2014-15. Mental health services and addictions services are being expanded, with more counselling and psychology services programs in our schools and a \$15 million renovation to Alberta Hospital Edmonton. That is good news.

Research and innovation procedures are saving lives and speeding recovery for thousands of patients every day. Heart failure patients are now being seen within two weeks after referral through the Mazankowski and the CK Hui Heart Centre, lung cancer patients have faster access to treatment through rapid access clinics, and the provincial stroke strategy means more Albertans are getting timely access to urgent stroke treatment. Insulin-dependent diabetics will have more coverage for supplies

that they need to monitor their blood glucose. Albertans can be proud of the health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. [interjection] Edmonton-Centre.

Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I was able to welcome and introduce a number of guests from the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose, part of the imperial court system of drag queens and kings which exists across Canada, the U.S., and Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, I've been honoured for several years to introduce the reigning court to this Assembly. I do this because I am very proud of my drag queens and kings for their style, elegance, and skills. I also do it because I want people to know of the important charitable work these courts do across the continent.

These courts take their protocol seriously. Few events I attend these days are truly formal or black tie never mind white tie, but these guys and gals take their long, carefully followed series of ceremonies and requirements, and they more than meet the dress code.

Now, each upper house of newly elected empresses and emperors is expected to travel to visit other cities in Canada, and that means new frocks, new shoes, new accessories, and hair. The higher the hair, the closer to God.

It's a tremendous personal commitment. This year, their 36th, no one could make that commitment of time and money so, according to protocol, the previous three empresses and emperors were asked to serve as regents, and today we have one of the three regent empresses, Marni Gras, with us in the gallery.

As a joint decision the regents are focusing their fundraising efforts on youth in their community this year, which includes the fyrefly youth leadership camp, a new camp the court created with HIV Edmonton for children with HIV and their families called the Millicent's Red Diamond camp, and they support safe place initiatives in Alberta schools and antibullying campaigns and projects. And by a safe place they mean for all children, not just those of the GLBT community.

The immense heart and generosity of the International Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose and their empresses and emperors is a great credit.

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

Property Rights

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and thank Albertans for their valuable input into an important matter, property rights. This past January several hon. members took part in a province-wide initiative to gather feedback from Albertans. The goal was to find grassroots solutions to the property rights concerns that Albertans have raised.

In February the government released a document that outlined what we heard along with the solutions provided to the Property Rights Task Force from Albertans and the government's response to these recommendations. The viewpoints provided by Albertans were consistent and can be broken into four overarching themes.

First, Albertans told us that they must be actively consulted about decisions that affect them. Albertans also told us that they need to be assured that they have access to courts, and Albertans expect appropriate compensation. Most importantly, they asked for an advocate to help them navigate through the process.

I'm very pleased to say that we have responded to Albertans with Bill 6, the Property Rights Advocate Act. The property rights advocate, under the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, will provide independent and impartial information to landowners and will work to ensure property rights continue to be protected.

It's very clear Albertans expect government to protect their property rights and to ensure their core values are represented when decisions are made in the public interest. I'm very proud that under our Premier's direction we're using the comments and solutions provided to us by Albertans to make improvements that will benefit all landowners.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Long-term Care for Seniors

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A week ago I met with family members of Tatiana Marchak, yet another senior who suffered severe neglect due to this government's failure to adequately fund staff and resources and monitor seniors' care facilities. On Friday evening January 10 Tatiana fell and hit her head. Her face was very badly bruised. Despite her obvious need for medical care emergency medical services was never called, and she died in a bed at St. Michaels a few days later. Given the overwhelming evidence even from the Health Quality Council to this government and to the Premier: why are you intentionally neglecting our seniors?

1:50

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this government extends our deepest condolences to the family of the lady to whom the hon. member refers.

What I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that I have checked into this case, and based on the information I have received, I have determined that this lady was under the care of a physician at the time of her death, that all of the appropriate procedures with respect to care assessments, case conferences, and compliance with standards were appropriately dealt with throughout the case.

What I must say to you, Mr. Speaker, and, I think, on behalf of many members of this House: this hon. member was a parliamentary assistant to the minister of health at the time of this incident. What did he not report that incident at . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the gloves are coming off. I was the parliamentary assistant, and I said to this government and Premier: I've lost faith and trust. They're failing our seniors.

To the minister: do you understand that by intentionally starving our public long-term care facilities of funding, a policy, Minister, that you implemented, that you were in charge of, that that minister administered – you've been starving these facilities and failing to monitor seniors' facilities – this government is responsible for abject humanitarian failure.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the question that should be asked by all members of this House is: if this hon. member had knowledge of this event at the time that it occurred in January of 2010, why did he not report it under the Protection for Persons in Care Act? If he chose not to report it, why does he raise it along with very graphic

and inappropriate pictures in the media on the eve of an election? Why is that?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, for once you're actually going to get a real, honest answer to a question, and the opposition will answer it. I actually just found out about this last week. I didn't know about this.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: given that the severe neglect of seniors such as Audry Chudyk and Grace Denyer has been dismissed by this minister and this Premier as unfortunate incidents, are you just going to look at this picture of Tatiana Marchak and say that this is just another unfortunate incident? The family wants this story told.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a disgraceful political play. He talks about dignity for seniors yet releases a picture of a senior who is obviously lying dead in a bed. I think that Albertans will look at that and judge for themselves.

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

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the family wanted that released so it never happens to any senior again.

Alberta First Nations Energy Centre

Dr. Sherman: Let's move on. The multibillion-dollar First Nation upgrader was so attractive to Chinese and Indian state oil companies and state banks that they would have competed for an equity stake if this government had not killed the project. PwC's study for the government of Canada confirmed the economic viability of the project. Senior Alberta Energy officials said that it would have paid the government itself \$20 billion over and above royalties. Equally important, the project would have meant . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister. [interjection] Hold on. Hold on. There's a time factor in questions and answers. I've recognized the hon. minister.

Do you wish to proceed or not?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the question was.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: India, China, PricewaterhouseCoopers, your own officials from the federal government, the indigenous peoples, and British Columbians say that this is a good project. They say one thing; the boys in the backroom say another. Do you even have an inkling of how deeply offended Alberta's First Nation treaty chiefs are at the Premier's and your arrogance in dealing with them and rejecting this project? Who is right?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, there was no arrogance at all in dealing with the First Nations. We met with them. We knew it wasn't good news. We told them that we deemed the risk too high to proceed. Albertans should understand – the Leader of the Opposition obviously doesn't want to understand – we want more upgrading. We have hundreds of thousands of BRIK barrels, but we're not going to commit to projects that are not economically viable and put the Alberta taxpayers at risk.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, let me get this right. Given that others in the world want to invest money here, create better jobs, especially for the indigenous peoples, and they have buy-in from everybody, a no-brainer, does the minister or the Premier have any explanation as to why they were so insulting to the First Nation chiefs in rejecting something that just made sense?

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, that is the most ridiculous mischaracterization of the way that these discussions were handled that one could imagine. Right from the time that the Premier asked me to handle this ministry, I met twice with the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs. We've had a protocol meeting. The Premier and I have met with the grand chiefs. The meeting that the member refers to was done most sincerely and as directly as possibly could be done. The reality is that if this project is viable . . .

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. When the Premier and the Minister of Energy kicked the First Nations upgrader project into the gutter, it was at the conditional commitment agreement stage. This stage involves zero risk to the province. The agreement required the First Nations to spend about \$200 million further developing the proposal. It also required the project in the end to be nearly three times as profitable to the Alberta government than the North West upgrader, which the province has already approved. To the Premier: why the higher standard for this project?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, they're comparing apples and oranges a bit here. The North West upgrader and this project are two totally different projects. They're at two totally different stages. The hon. member earlier had referenced how this project, they felt, was very, very viable. We hope that given the market, given the status of where the logistics of getting product to market are, projects will proceed. They don't necessarily need to have government intervention. We get projects unsolicited to us on a regular basis. Our job is to . . .

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier: would this project have been approved if it had the backing of three Calgary-based oil companies instead of three First Nations companies?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, for the, I think, third time in less than two weeks I'll repeat that it was strictly a business decision. We want more upgrading in this province. We have hundreds of thousands of BRIK barrels, but we cannot make commitments that are economically unsustainable. It's a risk to the Alberta taxpayer, and it's not one that we could accept and be responsible.

Ms Blakeman: Economically unsustainable. Hmm. I'm just curious. Back to the Premier again: is this, then, just a matter of the First Nations not contributing enough to the PC leadership campaigns given that MEG Energy gave \$65,000 to the five who declared their contributions, and the CNRL and Mr. Allan Markin ponied up \$135,000, combined, to the four of them?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans across this province take part in the democratic process. We encourage that, in fact, and we ask that all Albertans would do that. Both the Liberals and the Wildrose have received contributions from the same players in this

particular enterprise, so obviously that's not an issue. We don't worry about whether they've contributed to any party. What we do is that we make a decision based on the value for all taxpayers in the province, all taxpayers.

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

Municipal Taxation

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier was on radio with taxpayer-funded campaign ads promising no tax hikes. We now find out that one of her promises has come crashing down. Taxes are indeed on the rise. For instance, the city of Calgary's most recent report confirms a 7.2 per cent hike in the province's share of education property taxes, amounting to higher taxes for families. To the Premier: how can you look Albertans square in the eye and tell them you aren't raising taxes when, in fact, you are?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's very simple for me to do that because this is a very simple matter. We have not raised taxes, and we have not raised taxes in this budget. We have frozen the rates on properties. The assessment has gone up because there's more property being built in this province. There are more values being done. The rate of taxes in this province has not gone up. It has not gone up in this budget, and it's not going up next year either.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that Calgary isn't the only city in Alberta reporting provincial tax hikes, given that Edmonton, Vermilion, and my community of Fort McMurray among others have higher provincial taxes this year, would she consider putting together an Excel spreadsheet so that she can let us know how much her broken promise on taxes will cost us all?

2:00

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I've answered this question before. I've clearly laid out and it's clear in the budget that in 2011 the tax rates were the same as in 2012: \$2.70 per \$1,000 of assessment for residential and farmland property and \$3.97 per \$1,000 of assessment for nonresidential property.

Mr. Speaker, the amount of income tax collected and the amount of business tax collected in this province has gone up; the rates have not gone up. Alberta is the most prosperous place to be on Earth. People are making money, and I highly doubt they would like to see that go down.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, given that non answer, clearly, families' taxes are going up. Another broken promise.

Again to the Premier. Given that on page 100 of the fiscal plan of 2012 it says that "education property taxes will be frozen," what do you have to tell the thousands of Alberta families who are now going to be forking over more taxes to the government because you've broken your promise?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member obviously wasn't listening or cares not to hear the truth. The fact of the matter is that the province of Alberta is experiencing growth. We're experiencing economic activity that Albertans are enjoying and taking advantage of. Because we didn't raise the 10 per cent flat rate, our personal income taxes are still going up. They can't figure it out; the average Albertan can.

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

Long-term Care for Seniors

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under this government's watch Alberta seniors' care system has descended into profound disarray. The number of heart-wrenching stories describing seniors suffering from lack of care in our ERs, in our long-term care, in assisted living, and in their homes is overwhelming. The Conservative government's response is to let seniors and their families fend for themselves. My question is to the Premier: will she acknowledge that the seniors' care system right now is facing a crisis?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting. When you get out there with severely normal Albertans and you get into cases where there are long-term care facilities, supportive living, lodges, and foundations, our seniors are very, very happy.

Listen. I want to make sure everybody knows this number. I've said it a few times, but obviously we haven't heard it: 1.888.357.9339. This is the reporting line for abuse. Failure to report abuse is against the law.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this government is so out of touch. Given that this government's plan for the crisis is more undependable private care and higher costs for seniors and their families and given that a senior has just been evicted from a private care home when her family refused to tolerate price gouging, will the Premier acknowledge that her plan to lift the fee cap will only cause more hardship and commit today that she will retain the fee cap now, 12 months from now, and for a minimum of the next four years?

Mr. VanderBurg: I've said very, very clearly in the Assembly that the cap is not going anywhere; it's staying. Until this Assembly, the whole Assembly, and until Albertans north to south and east to west have had a debate over the next 12 months, that's what will happen. This cap is staying where it is.

Ms Notley: So what I hear, Mr. Speaker, is that there is no commitment for the next four years and that the long-term care cap is going to go.

Now, given that we've tabled in this Legislature for years hundreds, if not thousands, of testimonials from the front line on short-staffing in seniors' care facilities and given that so many seniors are suffering from this crisis in staffing every day, why won't this Premier take meaningful action to protect our seniors and commit to legislated staffing ratios and clear standards of care in our seniors' care homes?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, we have clear accommodation standards and clear inspections. We have publicly paid for health care in our seniors' facilities – publicly paid for health care – and we're going to remain doing that.

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

Rent Regulation

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent contacted me the other day to say that she had received notice from her landlord that he was increasing her rent by 34 per cent, from \$1,255 a month to \$1,682. Understandably, she's going to have to move. Hers is not an isolated case. With talk of a looming labour

shortage, the high price of oil, and a strong economy I'm wondering if this is the first sign of a rerun of 2005, when similar circumstances resulted in a housing crisis and skyrocketing rental prices. To the Premier: given that the attitude in the last housing crisis was that it was morally okay to charge what the market would bear no matter . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a market for housing, and the government has wanted to make sure that there's a wide variety of affordable housing available for Albertans. But in the private housing market prices can change. What we are seeing in Alberta is an improvement in the economy, in fact a considerable improvement in the economy, one of the best places in the country to live and work. We reacted when there were problems with housing prices previously, and we will certainly look at this situation to see whether there's any government . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, we certainly have not seen a 34 per cent increase in economic activity or in the growth of this economy in the last year.

Given that renters are not protected against landlords gouging them on the rent, will the government commit to implementing a yearly cap to prevent rent gouging?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we believe in a free economy. Now, we have taken action to protect renters. Rents can only go up once per year. We will not apologize for the prosperity of this province and the prosperity that Albertans enjoy.

Mr. Taylor: Well, again to the Premier: given that it's no more fun being homeless in a booming economy than it is in a broken economy and given this early warning sign of another potential spike in rents, how will she act to ensure that protections are in place before renters are facing another widespread affordable housing crisis?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. Rents can only be increased once per year. Secondly, they must provide a three-month notice to renters.

Now, we on this side of the House have added many more affordable housing units, more than any other province in this country, and we're proud of that. On this side of the House we've made sure that Alberta enjoys the most robust economy of any province in this country, and again we're proud of that.

Provincial Economic Strategy

Ms Woo-Paw: Mr. Speaker, business leaders in my constituency and, indeed, across Alberta have identified potential labour shortages as a key obstacle to economic growth. I understand the Deputy Premier recently went to Ottawa to discuss this issue with our federal colleagues. I'm interested in knowing more about what was accomplished.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I just returned very early this morning from Ottawa. We had some very, very productive meetings with Minister Kenney and Minister Finley around not only the immigration file but also the needs of our industry. We had industry representatives that went with me.

As you may know and as many in this House know, there's an alliance of 19 industry associations that have come together in Alberta because of the urgency of this matter. I'm very, very pleased to say . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. Labour is not the only factor that affects our economic prosperity. Quality infrastructure is also essential to supporting economic growth. Did your discussions also address that key issue?

Mr. Horner: Indeed, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity to meet with the President of the Treasury Board, with Minister Ambrose, and Minister MacKay. We did have a discussion around not only some of the areas where they've done something similar to our Bill 2, around capital planning, but also the building Canada fund, which we believe was very successful. We felt that the model that we started from has some areas we can grow to. I believe that the federal government is in tune with the infrastructure needs of Alberta, and we look forward to working with them in the future.

Ms Woo-Paw: Alberta's future economic growth will also depend on attracting more business and investment to the province. How can the federal government support our efforts to maintain Alberta's position as a leader in attracting investments?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we had some very interesting discussions around the key factor that will limit our growth, and that is the labour shortage that we're experiencing not only in our province but in a number of provinces in the country. Indeed, there are some things that could happen in eastern Canada that would start to use up some of the employment categories there, but also there are a number of employment categories in the United States. I believe we're going to have a very successful campaign with the ministers in the federal government on bringing skilled workers up from the United States.

Funding for Private Schools

Mr. Hehr: Choice in education is a United States-style code phrase for funding private schools. The Wildrose has signalled that they will adopt a money-follows-the-child philosophy that will fund these institutions. As the minister is aware, this practice led to a fundamental breakdown in the United States' educational system. To the Minister of Education: given recent developments has your government now gone all in and decided to adopt the Wildrose position that would lead to 100 per cent funding of private schools?

2:10

Mr. Lukaszuk: As a minister of children's education I fear any idea that comes from the Wildrose relative to education. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that we will continue the heritage of excellence in education in this province, and we will continue improving education in this province. We will allow the Wildrose to scare the children and their parents on what would happen if they were ever to be in government.

Mr. Hehr: To the same minister. Given that you already fund private schools to the tune of \$192 million, have you now permanently committed the taxpayer to fully subsidize these institutions?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is making sure that parents have choice. Parents are voting with their feet. They

can choose to send children to Catholic schools or public schools, charter schools or private schools, or they can offer educational programs at home. Parents get to choose. Because of the fact that these parents actually pay education taxes on their property taxation, it only makes sense that they also benefit from those taxes they pay. So up to 70 per cent – not paying for any additional fees or infrastructure – we are subsidizing the education of their children.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why has this minister sold out the public education system to right-wing groups without consulting with the general public or your educational partners?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, public education is something that Albertans are very proud of, and the majority of children in this province attend public schools. As a matter of fact, with the exception of private schools, all schools are funded publicly through the taxpayers of Alberta. Albertans are proud of investing in education, and we will continue investing in education. Now, what the other party chooses to do with education and how they would dismantle public education . . .

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

Bullying

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A soon-to-be-released documentary about bullying is causing controversy due to the fact that youth in the U.S. will not be able to view the film because of its restricted rating. The film called *Bully* was given an R rating because of its detailed depictions of bullying and coarse language. One teen activist in the U.S. has collected over 200,000 signatures on a petition that she presented to the Motion Picture Association of America to change the film's rating so that young people, whom the film is targeting, will be able to see it. My first question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Services.

The Speaker: The hon. minister, please.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Youth in our province will certainly be able to see the film because it has been given a PG rating. B.C., Ontario, and Manitoba have given it the same rating. While there is certainly coarse language and scenes that may be unsettling to audiences, the whole issue of bullying cannot be glossed over. It's an important conversation that teachers, students, and parents need to have. As well, with the PG rating parents can make informed decisions with their children before heading to the theatre.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. The second question is to the Minister of Human Services. What is this government doing to prevent bullying and to protect its victims?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it must be perfectly clear to this House and to Albertans that bullying in any form is unacceptable and can have a long-term impact, in fact, even a fatal impact on students and others. That's why education and public awareness of the issue are so important. Human Services co-leads an initiative with Education. We work closely with communities, parents, and teachers to create awareness. We have a 24-hour bullying helpline, 1.888.456.2323. I would say that in addition to the movie that was

referenced in the first question, Albertans should be aware that our very own Glen Huser wrote a book about bullying called *Stitches*.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. My final supplemental, but I consider it most important, is to the Minister of Education. What measures are in place to identify and protect victims of bullying in our schools? Our parents and our schools want to know.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, bullying is not acceptable anywhere, anyhow, for any reason. This Education Act, that we are hoping to pass in this Legislature if members of the opposition allow us to pass it, will probably be one of the most effective education acts in Canada that addresses bullying. We need to eradicate bullying. We need to send a strong message that bullying will not be accepted in Alberta schools.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Sexual Assault Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. National data shows that a shocking 60 per cent of Alberta women will experience sexual assault after the age of 16, and that happens to be 50 per cent higher than the national average. Sexual assault is underreported across the country, and support systems in Alberta for survivors are hit and miss across the province, with serious underfunding. The government of Alberta provides only \$1.6 million through Human Services to nine sexual assault centres, averaging less than \$200,000 per centre, totally inadequate and resulting in inconsistent service.

The Speaker: The hon. minister, please.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a very serious commitment to this very significant issue. In fact, violence against women is a very important subject for this government. Over the past 10 years we've had a crossministry task force on this. There's been considerable progress made. Some would suggest that one of the reasons the statistics are higher in Alberta is because of a higher level of awareness and a higher level of reporting. But that is not good enough. We have to do more. It's a very serious issue, and we take it very seriously.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, Calgary, Edmonton, Lloydminster, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray have four- to six-month waiting lists for counselling for women who have been sexually assaulted. How can that be acceptable in Alberta? What are you doing about that?

Mr. Hancock: Well, indeed, it's not acceptable in Alberta. It's not acceptable anywhere. It would be very, very good for us to be able to have services for people exactly at the time that they present and they need them. For that to happen, we need to have the personnel in place, we need to have the resources in place, and we need to have the caring and compassionate and collaborative social agency in the community in place. We're working on that through a provincial agency. We fund about \$1.7 million to that agency. That provides services through local agencies . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Dr. Swann: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the minister must see that that's totally inadequate for the women and families affected.

Why is the health department not involved in this and sharing in the commitment, when over half of the women in Alberta have been affected by this terrible travesty?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a joint approach. The Minister of Human Services and I together are working very closely on this issue. With respect to the Lloydminster situation, as an example, my ministry has provided as an interim solution a \$365,000 grant for 2012-13 to go to the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres. This will provide two full-time counsellors and one clinical supervisor in the Lloydminster sexual assault centre. It is a mobile centre. It will serve Bonnyville and Cold Lake.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Long-term Care Accommodation Standards

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With an aging population bulging the ranks of our seniors, it is vital that the utmost quality of care is provided to our most vulnerable seniors. Any suggestion that this standard is not being met in any facility is alarming. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Are there standards that must be adhered to in all continuing care facilities to ensure the safety and quality of care for residents, and if so, why does it seem that some people are falling through the cracks?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there most certainly are. The continuing care health services standards apply to any facility in Alberta where publicly funded health services are provided. Alberta Health Services is responsible for ensuring compliance with the standards. My ministry is responsible for oversight of Alberta Health Services and ensuring appropriate accountability within legislation, very strong legislation and very strong provincial standards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: is there enough money being invested into continuing care to ensure resident safety and the highest quality of care?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, again the answer is yes. Very significant financial investments are put into continuing care every single year, both in the form of money for capital expansion, for building a thousand new spaces a year, and in improving safety and quality throughout the system. Alberta Health Services spends approximately \$1.5 billion annually on continuing care, including home care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister. Some Albertans are saying that the government needs to step up and make improvements to the continuing care system for Alberta's seniors. How are we doing?

2:20

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are always looking for ways to improve the level of service that's offered across the province. I think that, without any acknowledgement of some of the generalizations that are often made in this House with respect to quality of care, it's safe to say that we are always looking for ways

to improve. We are looking most particularly to make sure that the level of health care offered in any setting is appropriate to the needs of that resident. And where it cannot be done in such a way, we work with families, we work with health care workers to ensure that the patient can be moved to a setting where those health needs can be met.

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

Long-term Care Serious Incidents

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December we heard the tragic story of a 35-year-old disabled man dying after being scalded in a bath at a group home where he lived. The Seniors minister and this government's reaction was slow and lacked the transparency that many seniors and their families were demanding. Yesterday in Public Accounts the deputy minister said that there had been 22 incidents in the past year of serious injuries or death in seniors' accommodations in group homes. Why haven't we heard of this alarmingly high number before? What went wrong in these group homes, and what is being done to protect our people?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, any serious injury is one too many. I will admit that there were five serious injuries and there was one death in that 22. But, as I say, one is not acceptable. We have great staff, and we have great care. Things happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instead of avoiding this issue, can the Seniors minister give us some real answers and explain to Albertans what these incidents were and what the government is doing to make sure they don't happen again?

Mr. VanderBurg: I can tell you exactly, Mr. Speaker. The one death was due to a fall. The fall was serious, and the person died. That's something that happened. It was very unfortunate for that person, that family, and the place where they lived. The other serious injuries were, I would expect, other falls, but I can get back to the member with further details.

Mrs. Forsyth: Minister, these are year-old stats, 2010-2011.

Given that all Albertans want full transparency, to know that they can feel safe to send their loved ones to facilities under government care, why has this government been keeping these numbers away from the public?

Mr. VanderBurg: We have a very transparent and open process with our inspections and our accommodations. It's on the website. You can check any facility, Mr. Speaker. You can see when they've been inspected, what the issues are where. We're not hiding anything. [interjection]

The Speaker: Some people might include in the definition of bullying those who yell at others.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

School Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday I asked about the Department of Education's ability to use schools as community hubs and, therefore, keep more of them open. The minister said school boards have to make hard choices, but I think

they would have to make fewer hard choices if their buildings could be used for other community purposes. To the Minister of Education: will he consider changing the school funding formula so that schools in mature neighbourhoods can stay open?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, our primary consideration is the quality of education that children receive in that school. As long as the number of children in the school is adequate for teachers and principals to satisfy themselves that they can still run a viable program and for parents to be satisfied with the viability of the program, the school should remain open. We can look at bringing in other allied services like daycares, before and after school centres, boys and girls clubs and YMCAs. But education is the vital point that needs to be considered.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: given that many mature neighbourhoods have a high proportion of immigrants and poor families, can the minister see that keeping schools open is a matter of social justice, not just a calculation of how many students are using the schools?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate. The primary consideration is the quality of education of children in the school no matter who the children are. All children are equal in our education, and they all deserve an equally high level of education. If the numbers warrant that a school stay open and if we can bring in additional wraparound services, particularly for immigrant communities, refugee communities, that is the right thing to do. But at the end of the day we have to have the high quality of education, which is reflected in the number of children that attend that school.

Mr. Kang: Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying we should compromise the quality of education.

To the minister again. The city of Edmonton recently announced plans to collaborate with different organizations, including school boards, to revitalize the older neighborhoods, but this minister said that community development is not his job. Can the minister tell us how many more schools are going to be closed because he has such a narrow focus for school buildings?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, since this member brought up this example, Mr. Speaker, Edmonton public school board right now has in excess of 40,000 empty seats, actually enough to accommodate the entire Edmonton Catholic school board and still have space left over. Indeed, those trustees have some difficult decisions to make, but all of their decisions have to be made primarily on what is best for children relative to the quality of education offered in the schools, not redevelopment of our neighbourhood or any other municipal considerations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

NOVA Chemicals Corporation Expansion

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in my constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka a large petrochemical company, NOVA Chemicals, announced that they are planning to spend up to \$900 million to increase polyethylene production at their Joffre plant in Lacombe county. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. What policies does this government have to encourage or facilitate this type of investment?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin by acknowledging the good work that this member has done on the Alberta Competitiveness Council as co-chair of the petrochemical team. Their work has contributed to a program called the incremental ethane extraction program, which has created the additional supply of ethane which has made possible this good-news story of a \$900 million expansion at the NOVA plant in Joffre.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can he explain how this program was used for the Joffre plant expansion?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to. NOVA and its partner, Williams, have come up with a new way of extracting ethane from the off-gas at the operators in Fort McMurray. They extract this off-gas and then transport it by pipeline down to Joffre, 17,000 barrels a day. Without this, those off-gases would either go into the environment as pollution or be burned just as feed stock, so it's a great value-added story for Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is for the President of Treasury Board and Enterprise. The enhancement of the incremental ethane extraction program was just one of the actions recommended by the Alberta Competitiveness Council. Can you tell me what else the government is doing to increase Alberta's competitiveness and to support economic opportunities in the petrochemical industry and other sectors of the economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Competitiveness Council is an important partnership between industry and government and has done a lot of good work identifying how we can take steps to improve our competitiveness. I, too, echo the Minister of Energy's comments about the MLAs that have been on these task forces with industry.

In the May 2011 report the council had 18 recommendations, priority actions to enhance our competitiveness in petrochemicals, chemicals, manufacturing, grains and oilseeds, and financial services. I'm pleased to report that we are making progress on all of these fronts, and next week we will be announcing . . .

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

Provincial Tax Policy

Mr. Hehr: This government says that after the election it will look at all revenue sources. Code word for taxes. I don't think that's right, Mr. Speaker. With an election looming, it's time to discuss this with Albertans now, but like Kim Campbell this Premier seems to think elections are no time to talk policy. To the President of the Treasury Board: does his government understand that our tax and revenue policies have led this government to spending virtually all of Alberta's resource revenues over the course of the last 25 years?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, this hon. member has been asking the same question in this House a number of times, and I would encourage him to review *Hansard*

for those answers. But I would say this. The tax policy of this government has allowed for the only jurisdiction in probably the western hemisphere that is experiencing the kind of growth, economic opportunity that we have in this province and no new taxes.

Mr. Hehr: To the same minister: given that this government's revenue policies are erratic, unsustainable, and we are mortgaging the future instead of saving for it, why won't the government repeal the flat tax, that sees a million-dollar-a-year executive pay the same rate as a \$40,000-a-year secretary?

2:30

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hardly think that a 10 per cent flat tax is erratic. I think, actually, it's very predictable, and it's something that Albertans and many coming to Alberta look to and say: that's why we're here. I hardly think that having no provincial sales tax is erratic. It's zero. People come to this province because of it. I hardly think that having the only jurisdiction in Canada where we are creating way more jobs than we have people for is erratic. It's a great opportunity. People come here because it's opportunity.

Mr. Hehr: To the same minister. Unlike Kim Campbell, I believe an election is the time to discuss real issues. Given that this government concedes it must eventually raise taxes, why not follow the Alberta Liberal lead, show some guts and integrity, and have the discussion before the next election, not after?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has certainly shown where the integrity is today, and it's not over there. We have not said that we're going to raise taxes. We have not said that we're going to change the budget that we have today, that we're going to pass in this House, I hope, in the very near future.

We could talk about how we do our capital plan, how we are going to leverage our assets. We're going to talk about the savings plan that we have for Albertans. We're going to talk about the operational reserve that we have, Mr. Speaker. We're going to talk about the fact that we have an operational surplus today and a cash deficit. We can do more, and we will.

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

Anthony Henday Drive

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anthony Henday Drive has been a massive project for the province so far. However, this project is not done, and my constituents are wondering when it will be finished. My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. How is the northeast leg of the Anthony Henday Drive progressing?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that we are well on our way to completing the largest project ever delivered in the province of Alberta. This is a public-private partnership. We called for bids, and three bids have been submitted. We're very close to making the selection, and we'll announce that in May. This is very exciting because construction of this last leg will start this summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the Minister of Transportation. When can we expect the Anthony Henday to be fully completed?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I can say that it's anticipated that the project will be completed in the early part of 2016. There are going to be nine kilometres of new roadway and 18 kilometres of improvement. This new project is going to benefit not only the citizens but, of course, industry. We are a commodity-based province.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please. [interjection] The hon. member. [interjection] Hon. member, you don't have another question? I called you three times.

Mr. Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, no further questions.

The Speaker: You're fine? Okay.

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

Postsecondary Institution Spending Accountability

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to academic freedom, this government must keep its hands off Alberta's universities and colleges, but when it comes to proper management controls, it has to ensure each institution is doing its job. The Auditor General's report this week makes clear that several of these institutions are failing this test badly. To the minister of advanced education. This government claims it wants world-leading postsecondary institutions, but after reading the AG's report, I must ask him: is this his definition of world leading?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we have world-leading institutions that are delivering top-quality programs across the province. The AG did bring to light some concerns around finances in some of our institutions, and we take those recommendations very, very seriously, as do our institutions. We've made it very clear to our institutions that they must correct these financial issues that they have, and in fact we've set up some processes to support them as they move forward to correct some of these things.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that these recommendations have been made in some cases for several years, it's pretty slow action.

To the same minister: what is his department doing to improve its accountability controls over postsecondary institutions before there is an expensive and embarrassing problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After seeing these recommendations, we have set about creating a whole new training program for audit committee members within our boards of governors that operate our postsecondaries.

Beyond that, we've also created a team that will be called the audit support team. They can go into all of our postsecondaries, look at the Auditor General's recommendations, support our institutions as they move forward in correcting those, and also

look at other issues that may create challenges for institutions around IT and financial.

Thank you.

Dr. Taft: To the same minister: given the damaging censure this week imposed on three universities in Ontario for improper safeguards over corporate funding of university programs, when will his department start working to tighten controls over corporate and other influence on postsecondary programs, funding, and research?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Alberta is a very collaborative place, and we do have a lot of relationships between business and postsecondaries as they work to solve the problems of the world. We're very proud of those relationships, but we also stand behind our institutions being fully at arm's length, operating with full academic freedom, with the ability to do the projects that they value and see as important to Albertans.

Critical Electricity Transmission Lines

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, a number of my constituents in Red Deer have talked to me about transmission lines in Alberta. Last month the government accepted the findings of the Critical Transmission Review Committee. Can the Minister of Energy explain the government's rationale for proceeding with this massive infrastructure project? Do we really need two lines instead of one?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is, yes, we do, and the answer is because of the dramatic growth. Since the last time the north-south backbone of our system was strengthened, 40 years ago, we've doubled in size, from under 2 million to almost 4 million. Since the need for reinforcement of the north-south grid, which is the backbone between Edmonton and Calgary – 85 per cent of Albertans live up and down the highway 2 corridor – was first identified in 2002, another 700,000 people have moved to Alberta. By the time we get the first line built, by 2015 or 2016, we're looking at another 200,000 people.

The Speaker: The hon. member, please.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Some of my constituents have also talked to me about the availability of natural gas in the Calgary region. Will the Minister of Energy explain why we can't see more generation closer to Calgary? Would that not reduce the need for two transmission lines?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it's an excellent question, and my constituents have asked me the same question. The answer is this. We're going to see lots more gas generation closer to Calgary. Enmax is building a plant at Shepard, TransAlta may build one at High River, but we're also going to see lots more gas transmission in the north on brownfield sites where existing coal plants are. There are all sorts of advantages there. You have existing sites, connections, community acceptance, but most important of all the brownfield sites in the north have water licences. Water licences are very, very hard to get in southern Alberta.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, my next question is also to the Minister of Energy. Won't this cost too much, and what's the

point of building a world-class system that we can't afford? It's all because my constituents are afraid of having to pay too much money.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, another very good question and a question that I get from my constituents as well. The answer here is fairly simple. These two lines are going to cost around \$3 billion to build, but because they're intended to last, to serve Albertans for the next 40 years, we are proposing and we are undertaking to extend the financing, the repayment of this, over the next 40 years, not front-end loaded on the users for this first decade. The Premier has made a commitment, and I've made the commitment. We want to do what's right not just for the next couple of years but what's right for the next couple of decades. Spreading out the costs like that will protect consumers, commercial and residential, for the next decade.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we've expended the time allocated today for question-and-answer period. Eighteen members were recognized, with 106 questions and responses.

2:40

Statement by the Speaker

Anniversary of the First Session of the Legislative Assembly

The Speaker: Before we continue, I'd just like to draw to your attention the significance of this day in the history of the province of Alberta. One hundred and six years ago today, on March 15, 1906, some 4,000 people attended the opening of the First Session of the First Legislature in the history of the province of Alberta. This occurred at the Thistle rink here in Edmonton. As its first item of business the new Legislative Assembly elected Charles Wellington Fisher as its first Speaker. Fisher's nomination came through a nomination by Premier Alexander C. Rutherford, which was seconded by Charles W. Cross, the Attorney General and Member for Edson.

Premier Rutherford's speech at the opening of the First Legislature explained that the House would be "laying the foundations of empire in this new land" – I want you to listen very carefully – and he called to mind the significance of the role of the Speaker in this endeavour.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

World Consumer Rights Day

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is World Consumer Rights Day. Fifty years ago President John F. Kennedy outlined his vision for consumer rights. "Consumers, by definition, include us all," he said in his speech. In commemoration of that speech government and consumer organizations around the world recognize March 15 as World Consumer Rights Day each year.

Here in Alberta we know that a fair marketplace encourages consumer confidence and that consumer confidence is vital to the healthy and vibrant free-enterprise economy of our province. This is why the Alberta government has strong consumer protection laws and works hard to enforce them. Last year alone the Service Alberta ministry investigated more than 800 consumer complaints and recovered nearly \$1 million on behalf of consumers. The

courts gave offenders nearly \$131,000 in fines and in some cases jail time.

But enforcement is only part of protecting consumers. Consumer education is a basic right, and the Service Alberta ministry has resources to keep consumers wise on the problems out there. People who are aware of their rights and responsibilities and who know how to spot warning signs are in a better position to avoid scams and dishonest businesspeople. When consumers have concerns, they can call the consumer contact centre at 1.877.427.4088. The centre assisted more than 275,000 Albertans last year alone with information, referrals, and help in filing formal complaints. So while World Consumer Rights Day is being celebrated around the world, we promote consumer rights and awareness right here in Alberta that help us all.

Thank you.

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

Social Enterprise

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to talk about the need for a social innovation agenda here in this province, one where there is an important role for social enterprise in this agenda. Social enterprises are organizations that sell goods or provide services in the market for the purpose of creating a blended return on investment, both financial and social. Their profits are returned to the business or to a social purpose rather than maximizing profits for shareholders. Broadly speaking, they're privately owned ventures that have a strong blended financial and socially responsible return on investment.

Benefits to communities and society include stimulating economic revitalization, reducing poverty, creating employment opportunities and experience, reducing crime, addressing environmental issues, providing accessible health care, building social capital, enhancing cultural capital, integrating immigrants, and providing basic services to underserved communities.

But the most important benefit, Mr. Speaker, is facilitating social innovation. Social innovation usually happens between the profit, not-for-profit, and public service sectors, and it happens when perspectives of these three sectors collide to spark new ways of thinking.

Mr. Speaker, in the Manning Centre for Building Democracy's special briefing on big society and social responsibility this past June, Nicholas Gafuik, who is a good friend of mine from university, indicated that civically engaged communities are essential for better social outcomes and that government alone is just not enough. That's why I brought forward Motion 507 on the Order Paper under private members' business, where I suggest the government undertake a review of current social entrepreneurship in Alberta in order to aid the development of a platform that will encourage co-operation within and among the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors relating to social enterprise.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Long-term Care for Seniors

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are far too many seniors in Alberta not getting the help they need because of a government that has not acted. This failure is reflected in at least four ways.

First, in the long-term care centres we do have, there are no staff-to-patient ratios. As government funding falls short or profit margins are prioritized, staff are cut, they burn out, and patient

care is deeply compromised. We've shared countless reports of seniors being left in their own waste for hours, falling while unattended, or being fed in bed, where they are left to linger for days, yet this government has not acted.

Secondly, this government broke its promise to build new long-term care. Instead, long-term care spaces have disappeared. Long-term care provides the greatest level of medical care. Studies show that patients in long-term care end up in hospital much less than those who rely on lower care assisted living, yet the Tories repeatedly stick to their mantra, one that defies the evidence of all experts, that assisted living spaces with standards that are a moving target can somehow provide the care that is required by our most vulnerable seniors, so this government has not acted.

The government brags about funding new spaces in assisted living, yet after three years they cannot tell us what level of care is provided in those spaces. The minister of health had the audacity to suggest that the horrible experience of the Denyer family at a private assisted living centre happened because the centre misrepresented the level of care they provided. But if this government can't tell us what level of care their assisted living spaces provide, how do they expect vulnerable seniors and their families to be able to decipher the standards? So when it comes to protecting families and seniors from exploitive centres, this government has not acted.

Now, if that isn't all bad enough, this Premier proposes to lift the fee cap on long-term care although they refuse to come clean with Albertans on that until after the election. If this plan goes forward, exorbitant fee structures will be used for patient cherry-picking and as a tool for intimidating seniors and their families who don't behave. The Tories need to commit to keeping the fee cap, not for 12 months but indefinitely.

Once again, this government has not acted, and all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, will pay the price.

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

Goodwill Industries of Alberta

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Goodwill Industries of Alberta is a not-for-profit agency that provides training and job opportunities for Albertans with disabilities and other barriers to employment. In Calgary Goodwill partners with persons with developmental disability funding agencies such as the Calgary Progressive Lifestyles Foundation, Columbia College, and Prospect Human Services. Donated goods and clothing are collected and sold in their retail stores to support employment programs for Albertans with employment challenges.

On March 9 the Minister of Seniors attended the grand opening of Goodwill Industries' new Chinook store in Calgary, and what a great celebration it was. Everyone who attended was given a T-shirt to wear that says One Man's V-neck Is Another Man's Future. This is such an appropriate slogan because it uniquely tells the story of Goodwill Industries, the items they collect and sell and the people they employ.

We all know that having a job means much more than just a paycheque. It gives us a sense of pride, a way to connect with our community, meet new people, and learn new skills. Employers who hire people with disabilities have learned that these individuals have plenty of valuable skills to contribute to their workplaces. Unfortunately, there are still attitudes out there in the job market that can make finding meaningful work a challenge for people with disabilities. That's why we need employers like Goodwill, who are willing to give Albertans with disabilities a chance to show us what they can do, and they can do a lot.

In 2011 Goodwill employed 34 PDD clients at four locations in Calgary. Goodwill has contributed \$6 million to the Calgary economy and saved over 4 million kilograms of used clothing and household goods from going into our landfills.

Mr. Speaker, Goodwill is an outstanding example for businesses in all of our communities to follow. Thank you very much.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the House that on Monday, March 19, 2012, Written Question 2 will be accepted, and Written Question 1 will be dealt with. Also on Monday, March 19, 2012, Motion for a Return 3 will be accepted, and motions for returns 1, 2, and 4 will be dealt with.

Thank you.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Bill 205 Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill addresses a serious problem that exists across the province today. In the first 11 months of 2011 there was over \$1.5 million worth of copper wire stolen in Edmonton and Calgary alone. These thefts are only profitable because there's a market for the metal. My bill's goal is to close a large part of that market. My bill will permit the province to require that scrap metal dealers and recyclers keep a record of those they buy their metal from in order to facilitate catching sellers of stolen goods. I look forward to debating this bill soon with all hon. members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Bill 209 Homeowner Protection Act

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I am very honoured to be able to rise on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffer to introduce Bill 209, the Homeowner Protection Act.

Now, this bill is modelled on the B.C. legislation. The purpose of it is to strengthen consumer protection for buyers of new homes, to improve the quality of residential construction, and to support research and education respecting residential construction in Alberta. It establishes a homeowner protection office and requires residential builders to be licensed by the homeowner protection office. Residential builders can lose their licences if they contravene the act.

Home warranty insurance will now be mandatory on all new homes and must provide coverage as follows: three years on defects in materials and labour, five years on defects in the

building envelope, and 10 years on structural defects. Monetary penalties may be imposed on anyone who contravenes the act.

It also establishes a public registry of residential builders which lists their current licence as well as any suspensions or monetary penalties that have been imposed. If a homeowner is required to leave their home for a period of more than a month, 30 days, on account of needed repairs, the bill requires the home warranty insurance provider to cover any property taxes or utility fees during this period.

There are a number of other sections to it which I won't go into. I look forward to the opportunity to participate in the debate of this bill.

At this point, on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffer I move first reading. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then Calgary-Varsity, then Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition signed by 293 Albertans and collected by Concerned Neighbours in Partnership. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass legislation to repeal the Land Assembly Project Area Act . . . and its amending Bill 23 . . . the Alberta Land Stewardship Act . . . and its amending Bill 10 . . . the Electric Statutes Amendment Act . . . and Carbon Capture and Storage Bill . . . thereby restoring property and democratic rights of Alberta landowners.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a further 20 letters out of the hundreds I've received from the following individuals who are concerned about the proposed logging in the west Bragg Creek area and who are requesting a complete facilitated and accessible public consultation: Shawn Bond, James Penman, Linda Torinski, Jane Snider, Daryl Gingras, Darlene Barrett, Jennifer VanZwam, Sheila More, Carol Ann Schmaltz, Lynn Gallen, Rod Burns, Deborah Klein, Keith Tanner, James and Paula Bildfell, Tammi Kozub, Peter and Linda Cruttenden, Giles Parker, and Matt Dymant.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make some tablings on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition of some documents that were referenced in the leader's questions of Tuesday, March 13. These are fact sheets provided by the Parkland Institute on research dealing with the aging population, for-profit delivery of long-term care, the Alberta Health Quality Council report, and a number of other fact sheets on care for seniors in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on tablings.

Mr. Elniski: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail I received today from

Mrs. Marion McIlwraith, the assistant principal at M.E. LaZerte school, thanking for the little bit of a member's statement we did last week on Thom Elniski. In it she states:

While Doug was speaking three of the Wild rose members were chatting quite loudly. I felt bad for Nicola, Thom's [widow] . . . They are definitely disrespectful and not good role models for the students who were watching. I hope I have it right that it was the Wild rose party, they were sitting on the far right side facing us.

I have assured her that it was.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair wishes to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter received today from the hon. Member for Strathcona's constituency with respect to private members' business.

I also indicated yesterday that I would make some comment today with respect to the letter that I'd received on Wednesday of this week requesting that a certain order of business be advanced. I indicated that members might want to refer to *Hansard* going back in the past.

Statement by the Speaker

Private Members' Public Bills

The Speaker: I'll be rather brief here today because much of this is indicated previously in the Assembly. We dealt with it on November 27, 2001; December 1, 2003; May 8, 2006; November 23, 2009. I indicated then that the processes guiding us here in the Assembly is Speaker Schumacher's ruling of February 11, 1997, when he outlined a procedure for early consideration of bills. Point 3 was that if a member wants early consideration of his or her bill, they must write to the Speaker prior to the opening of the Assembly on the sitting day before the bill is to be considered. This certainly was done this week, when the Official Opposition House Leader wrote yesterday requesting early consideration on behalf of the leader of the caucus, and the letter was tabled yesterday as well.

Point 4 in the 1997 ruling is:

When a member requests that his or her Bill be considered before its due date, the Bill will be called after debate has concluded on the private member's public Bill that is then before the House or Committee of the Whole, assuming that no other Bills have reached their due dates.

In this case no other bills until a few minutes ago were even identified for being considered as the Member for Strathcona has just introduced his bill. So according to the practice and precedents which this Assembly has relied upon since 1997, Bill 203 will be the first order of business on Monday, March 19, 2012, after Orders of the Day are called. Once again the chair hopes that the next Legislature will review this issue.

As for Monday the chair notes that there may be time to have the Member for Strathcona move his bill for second reading if Committee of the Whole does not go the two-hour extension. Looking back for the length of the debate on this bill earlier this week, it did not reach two hours, in fact. One would suspect – and it seems to be almost unanimous consent of the Assembly, so one could almost think in one's head that the amount of time that would be utilized in committee on Monday would not be anywhere near that two-hour time frame, which, hopefully, will allow the hon. Member for Strathcona to stand and move his bill for second reading as well.

Of course, once again, the bill will be taken up and can be taken up when the Assembly reconvenes on April 2 following the constituency week break.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Bhullar, Minister of Service Alberta, response to questions raised by Mr. Kang, hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, and Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on February 15, 2012, Department of Service Alberta main estimates debate.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: Official Opposition House Leader, you go first.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would now ask the Deputy Government House Leader to please share with us the projected government House business for the week beginning the evening of Monday, the 19th of March, or perhaps the afternoon of Tuesday, the 20th of March.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. Our projected government business for the week of March 19 will be second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading on Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2012. We'll be projecting Committee of the Whole and third reading on Bill 4, Bill 2, Bill 5, and Bill 6.

Thank you.

3:00

Ms Blakeman: Sorry. Excuse me. Could we get an expansion of that? We usually get when this is going to happen so that we're able to schedule to have the correct people on. You've told me what you're doing but not when. If you would be able to share that with me, perhaps a paper version a little later, that would help.

The Speaker: Well, let's do it now because we're in the Assembly, and all members have the right to know.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, sir. I agree.

Mr. Weadick: I would be happy to share a paper version with all of the members here later today.

The Speaker: Okay. So, hon. minister, that's to all desks, all members. There is some courtesy that's required in all of this.

Mr. Weadick: Yes.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 7

Appropriation Act, 2012

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2012.

The act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government for the 2012-13 fiscal year. The schedule to the act provides amounts that were presented in greater detail in the 2012-13 government and Legislative Assembly estimates tabled on February 9, 2012, and then subsequently debated in Committee of Supply and policy field committees over the past many days.

Through Budget 2012 the government of Alberta is following through on its commitment to Albertans by responsibly investing in programs that support Albertans' quality of life without raising taxes and positioning the province to balance the budget by 2013-14. Seventy-five per cent of this budget is focused on the core programs of health, education, and human services. It provides Albertans with better access to health care and support for our growing seniors population while ensuring a better quality of life for the vulnerable and continuing to build the best education system in Canada.

It delivers on the Premier's commitment to invest in family care clinics, enhance AISH benefits, strengthen child care subsidies, and provide stable funding for education, postsecondary, and municipalities to improve their planning. Budget 2012 is the start of what we want to accomplish on behalf of Albertans and lays the foundation for what we are striving to achieve over the next 10 years.

I ask all Members of the Legislative Assembly to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the hon. member is correct. There was quite a discussion on this budget through the committee process or whatever you want to call it these days. It was a process that many opposition members found quite frustrating. There were certainly many questions asked but very few direct answers.

I think that whenever we discuss any budget of this government, we have to be cautious. Budgets change here frequently. In this Appropriation Act we are certainly giving ourselves significant room to manoeuvre. The President of the Treasury Board and Enterprise may transfer money around. That's understandable. There are limits, and there have been limits set, but there's always a way around that. One only has to wait until the quarterly updates to see.

I had a discussion in budget debates regarding the estimates and the amount that is requested through this appropriation bill. I was never, never satisfied with the answers I received from the President of the Treasury Board and Enterprise whenever I brought this up. If hon. members look at the budget estimates, there is an actual amount in each and every department for 2010-11, there is a budget amount for 2011-12 and a forecast amount for 2011-12, and the estimates for the year 2012-13. One could go through each and every department, and I did with some departments. After I had this discussion with the Treasury Board president and his officials at committee, I thought I would reread what the minister had referred me to and have a second look.

The minister suggested that the changes that I was talking about in the actuals, in the audited financial statements from the annual reports from 2010-11 – the departments had been reorganized in October when the new Premier took over, and that is the reason why those amounts from the annual report would have changed.

The hon. minister directed me to page iii of the budget estimates. I challenged him then and I'm going to challenge the government now over the government reorganization and how there could be differences in the government estimates and how they would reflect differently in the annual report for 2010-11 of the government of Alberta, in Budget 2011, tabled on February 24, 2011, and in the third-quarter fiscal update, released on February 9, 2012.

Now, again, to be specific, there's no mention of any of the ministry's annual reports in this adjustment, if one wants to call it that. The principal changes to the government budget lines, or the estimates, the changes that are in amounts of \$1 million or more, are apparently mentioned in these three documents. You can go down the list. You have Human Services; we know where that came from. We have the Ministry of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations. I must say that I had an event at a francophone community here the other day, and they were so disappointed that the Francophone Secretariat had been moved to the Ministry of Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations. They couldn't understand why that happened, and I had to admit to them, Mr. Speaker, that neither could I.

Now, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, the Ministry of Infrastructure, the Ministry of Executive Council, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security, and the Ministry of Treasury Board and Enterprise: these are the ones, according to the budget estimates, where there were significant organizational changes. So maybe there could be some budget changes.

Specifically with Alberta Health, in Bill 7 here there is a request for \$15.8 billion in expenses and an additional \$77 million in capital investment. This is what is requested through Bill 7 for the department of health. Now, the department of health is not on this list, but whenever you compare the budget estimates for the department of health with the annual report for 2010-11 – and I remind you that this is an audited annual report from the office of the Auditor General – I would like answers from the government, and I feel that these are reasonable questions.

When I look at this request for \$15.8 billion and then I look at the actual amount for Health and Wellness, which my research indicates was not changed whatsoever with the government reorganization in October of last year – so there were no changes in that – there's no explanation from the government on why the annual report indicates that in the communications budget of Health and Wellness \$1,701,000 was spent. But in this budget document, the actual is \$400,000 more. Strategic corporate support: again a different number, a number that's greater than what's anticipated in the budget estimates for that year. This goes on and on and on, and I would just like an explanation from someone on the government side as to why these numbers are different.

3:10

The President of the Treasury Board tried to explain, but I really don't believe, Mr. Speaker, that he understood. He pretended that he did and that it was my interpretation of this, but it's clear in here that there's a different set of numbers. These are actuals from 2010-11. I have the annual report before me. There's one that is so far out that I think the government should do some research on this and respond back to the Assembly here on Monday. I just need an explanation.

Now, I'm looking in government estimates, element 6.2, immunization support. In 2010-11 the actual in here that was spent was \$10,067,000, but if you look at the annual report for the same year, that was released last summer while the Progressive

Conservative leadership race was on, you will see where immunization support for operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases was essentially a hundred million dollars. That's a big difference. That's a 2010-11 actual, \$110 million, and this is an audited financial statement from the office of the Auditor General. Yet we have this big difference from what is listed in the estimates, and that total goes through to Bill 7, a hundred million dollars versus \$10 million. [interjection] Yes. I looked at this.

I also looked at a couple of other departments, including the other support programs amount in the actuals for Health and Wellness for 2010-11 in the estimates. It's stated here that the actual amount spent was \$13.1 million, but when I look at the annual report, the audited annual report, for other support programs it's \$37 million. So that's again a significant difference. It's close to \$24 million. What's going on here? When I look at other support programs under the same spending element, they're the same. Out-of-province health care services, \$107 million. It's the same; it balances. Why are some numbers the same and some numbers different?

Before we go any further, I would certainly point out one-time operating funding, half a billion dollars. So you would think that maybe that changed. But we see, Mr. Speaker, where it did not. That would be an example of one expense that was standard or consistent, but other support programs were not. Continuing care initiatives were the same. Health services provided in correctional facilities: \$26 million is what's stated in the annual report.

Before we go any further with this budget, I really think the government owes taxpayers and the Official Opposition an explanation as to why in two different government financial reports we have two different sets of numbers. I may be wrong here, but I thought that once an annual report was audited and it was published, if there was a change to the actual number, there would be an adjustment noted. Now, I would really appreciate an explanation on Monday or whenever we get back into debate on this. I would really appreciate an explanation to that.

I would also like a further explanation – and there's a lot of money here in rent supplement programs. I'm not saying that they are a bad thing, but I would like to know more before I vote on this bill. The rent supplement program along with associated revenue from federal transfers is now administered by the Alberta Social Housing Corporation out of its statutory appropriations. This program had previously been reported as part of the expense supply vote of the Department of Municipal Affairs. Both the corporation's and the department's comparable amounts have been restated accordingly, and that's explained here. The question I would have is: in the future are we going to have to go to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation to see how much of a rent supplement there is and where it is going or, essentially, which landlords are getting the supplement? How is that program going to be administered?

Ms Blakeman: It's gone, isn't it?

Mr. MacDonald: Well, this is what I don't understand about this note in the estimates. It's gone into Alberta Social Housing Corporation, and how does an opposition person or an interested citizen or a taxpayer figure out how much money is being spent and where? Is it inside the budget documents, or is it outside? I guess that's the question, hon. members.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I also have some questions about the AISH program which I never had an opportunity to get on the record during debate and also questions regarding PDD funding. I think that in light of the time I'd better do the PDD funding first.

Certainly, there are individuals, particularly parents of PDD clients, who are quite concerned about the inspection process of their home or the facility that is now being set up. I think it's being set up for the 1st of April. They're quite worried about, essentially, whether they're going to pass the inspection or not.

I find it quite interesting that this group is now being inspected on a regular basis when for other groups that we have thought should have been inspected for years, there doesn't seem to be any change on the part of the government to make sure that, for instance, let's say, nursing homes are inspected in a routine fashion and that the inspections occur at random times. They don't phone in advance and say, "I'm coming to Stony Plain on Thursday of next week" so that it gives the operator time to get everything all polished and organized. Random inspections have a purpose. The results of the inspection: make them public.

Speaking of public, in Public Accounts yesterday – and I haven't had a chance yet to check it out – it was implied by Alberta Seniors that all of the inspection reports from all facility inspections are available online. I'm looking forward over the weekend to having a look to see if I can find those inspection reports.

Ms Notley: You won't find much in them.

Mr. MacDonald: I won't find much in them. Will I be disappointed?

Ms Notley: You'll be a little disappointed at the specifics.

3:20

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. I don't want to pick on anyone here, but I was at a Hardisty nursing home the other day, and one of the children of a resident, a fellow that, I would assume, was well over 40, asked me about the inspection reports and where he could find them. I hope I didn't mislead him. I told him: well, I don't know that they're publicly available. I told him that they should be and that they should be right there on the bulletin board for you to look at, but they weren't there.

I hear that now in this budget year PDD folks are going to have to open their homes to an inspector and have the inspector look around. Maybe it's a good thing; maybe it's not. Whenever I hear from the PDD folks, they think it's an overreaction. They could be right because so many of these individuals and so many of these families are doing as much as they can so that other people can live in dignity and respect. I think we should always respect that, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion with Bill 7, I can give the government members many examples of numbers that are totally different from the annual report when we're comparing our budget actuals in 2010-11 to what we're requesting this year in the budget estimates. I will sit down and work with the government members if they can provide me with an explanation as to why these numbers were changed with some amounts and not changed with others. We're not talking \$1,000 or \$500,000 here. In one case in the health budget we're talking in excess of \$100 million. I think taxpayers are owed an explanation before we vote on this budget.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak on Bill 7 in second reading. This is, of course, a very important bill. This is the bill which will ultimately result in the approval of the budget that this government has put forward, the

first budget put forward by our new Premier and one which, at one point, I think the Premier and her staff had believed would circumscribe the political platform of the campaign that they hope to successfully launch. I think that in many people's eyes the decision to stay here to pass this budget is being seriously reconsidered in terms of its overarching wisdom. Nonetheless, we are here, and we are looking at this budget.

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

I have to say that it's interesting that this is a budget that the Premier would have decided to bet her government's political future on because it's not exactly a budget that I would describe, in the words of the Premier's well-known campaign manager, as bold. Really, it's a budget that I would describe as being the kind of thing where you're really frantically cleaning up because you've got a bunch of people that have suddenly announced they're coming over to your house and you forgot that you'd actually invited them. So rather than actually doing a proper cleaning, you're sort of sweeping stuff under the rug and hoping that nobody notices. That's sort of the sense that I get when I read through this budget and as I participated in the debates that we had over the course of the last five weeks.

Now, as someone who has spent a lot of time engaging in budget debate, who believes that budget debate is really a fundamental role of legislators, I need to put it on the record that I think it was an extremely antidemocratic, untransparent decision on the part of the Premier and those whom she directs to have three ministries have their budget debate on the same day. It's ridiculous as it is that we only have, you know, three hours to debate budgets that are up to \$14 billion, \$15 billion, but that, in addition, we had those budget debates happening at the same time as other ministries' budget debates was remarkably rushed and untransparent. It really undermined the quality of the oversight that could be given to the government's decision in this regard.

Generally speaking, we're looking at a budget that, I would suggest, is based on assumptions and presumptions which are highly optimistic in some cases, that probably are not terribly evidence based, that try to gloss over some of the significant policy challenges that this government has by sort of issuing a press release, attaching a couple of million dollars to it, and hoping that no one notices that they haven't really addressed the challenge and hoping that people will just give them one more turn, and that way they will make the hard decisions after the election. This is very much a *mañana, mañana* budget. This is: let's just sort of, you know, sneak this under, and then we'll have an election, and then we'll make the hard decisions, but we really don't want to have the conversation about the fundamental fiscal challenges that exist in this province.

Let me just start in a few areas. I guess the first thing that is really important to the NDP caucus – and we say this in pretty much every budget debate, but it's worth reminding people – is that a report of the parliamentary financial officer a couple of years ago did a 25-year review of all of the governments in Canada, federal and provincial, and went through that review and concluded that the governments most likely to balance their budget in Canada were NDP governments. Who knew? But, indeed, it was true. That's even taking into account the incredibly ineffective attempt at balancing the budget that we saw in Ontario under the now federal Liberal Leader, Bob Rae. The NDP even took responsibility for that failure in that set of statistics but still came out ahead as the government most likely to balance the budget.

One of the ways that happens, Mr. Speaker, is that we take a realistic view of our revenue situation, and we balance it in a way that meets the interests of the greatest number of citizens, not corporations who have their head offices in some city outside of this country, not the top 2 per cent of the most wealthy but the greatest number of citizens.

We think that there are three things that we could do that would generate more revenue so that we could actually have a realistic conversation about some of the policy challenges we have as well as a realistic conversation about places that need to be changed or reduced. The fact of the matter is that, you know, the general rate for corporate income tax in Alberta – and this is something that our party was the only one to vote against consistently as the government was reducing the rate of corporate income tax – is 10 per cent. The average of the 10 provinces is 12.3 per cent. No other province has a rate of less than 10 per cent. Given that Alberta has no sales tax, we already offer a significant tax advantage, so corporate taxes could be increased moderately while maintaining Alberta's competitive tax position, and in so doing, we could increase revenue.

Personal income taxes. Because of Alberta's flat tax upper-income Albertans pay the same 10 per cent as everyone else who has taxable income. No other province comes close to the 10 per cent rate that we apply for upper-income earners. Ontario's top marginal rate is 11.16 per cent – that's the closest – but upper-income earners in Ontario also pay a surtax on top of that. Newfoundland and Labrador are the next lowest, at a 13.3 per cent tax rate for their upper-income earners. So, easily, Alberta could increase just by one or two points what it is we are having our upper-income earners pay and still remain the most competitive province in the country. In so doing, we could increase the revenue coming into this province to deal with some of the unresolved and unaddressed and ignored issues that this government has not dealt with over so long.

The other thing, of course, that we talk about in our caucus is the fact that this government essentially capitulated to the oil and gas industry. They knew that the majority of Albertans wanted to see a fair royalty structure. Their own experts recommended that we needed to have a fair royalty structure. The Auditor General said that we needed to have a fair royalty structure. This government ran on creating a fair royalty structure, and then their friends in the oil and gas industry got angry and started threatening them and created another party, and then, you know, all heck broke loose.

Needless to say, we've not moved forward anywhere on that, and we are selling our resources for a song at the expense of our environment, at the expense of our children, at the expense of our future. It's the most horrendously negligent management of one of the richest resources in the world that I've ever seen, Mr. Speaker. The fact that this budget doesn't deal with that is just one of the many concerns we have about it.

3:30

Now, when you look at the expenditure side of the coin, Mr. Speaker, there are a few areas where we have concerns. Generally speaking, there were some good areas. I want to give the government credit for the change that they made to the AISH system. It's been long coming. I know that the minister is very conscious of the fact that the cheques go out March 26, which may also happen to be the day the Premier decides to drop the writ, and that's a little bit coincidental.

I certainly hope that going forward we will not have to rely on an election cycle to see some of our most vulnerable Albertans receive an income that would keep them within sight, at least, of

the poverty line. Of course, they're unfortunately on the wrong side of the poverty line in Alberta, but if we can at least sort of keep them moving forward somewhat, that would be a good thing.

It's good that we've put money into AISH. The concern that I have is that there are a vast number of Albertans who don't qualify for AISH. In the income support itself, the ministry recognizes that there is a vast group of Albertans who they deem as having barriers to full employment as a result of chronic illness, permanent illness, or permanent disability, yet those people aren't eligible for AISH. They live on an amount of money which is about – I don't know. I know that if that person has two children, as a single parent they receive something like \$1,100 a month. That's shameful in a province that claims to be as rich as ours, Mr. Speaker.

Advanced Education. Everybody is the first to sing the praises of advanced education and talk about how our future will be built on that. Unfortunately, this government is not the first to dedicate adequate resources to it. The ministry's total budget has once again decreased and this time by more than 2 per cent. I appreciate that some of that is capital expenditure, but there's a reason for why that capital expenditure was there.

They've been touting their three-year funding commitment, but it's no big celebration if we're spending three years telling people: "Guess what? We're going to pay you this amount. You can count on not getting enough for the next three years." That's not at all what we need. There are a multiplicity of areas within the advanced education system that are not receiving adequate support and where the quality of education and the accessibility of education in our province are deteriorating and going down. Here we are on the eve of another boom – at least that's what everyone says – and we're walking away from our advanced education system.

Education, K to 12. A critical, important issue. It's an issue that matters a great deal to me. Again, the same argument. In fact, it's even worse than it is with advanced education. This ministry and this Premier celebrated themselves repeatedly because they actually gave back the money that they took out six months ago, and somehow that was supposed to represent a change. Again, promising a three-year predictable cycle of funding, when it's very clear that the predictable cycle of funding is grossly inadequate, is not a victory. It doesn't help that we know that for the next three years we're not going to have enough money.

This budget assumes that salary increases for teachers will only be 1 per cent. Given what we know – that we're talking about a boom, that we know what the cost of living is, that MLAs here expect to receive 4 or 5 per cent – I have no idea why it is that we would budget on a 1 per cent increase for teachers. Clearly, we're going to shortchange it. So we're not dealing with that properly.

We once again continue to be one of the only provinces in the country that does not fund school lunch programs across the board for high-needs students. Our students pay for that, our children pay for that, and our educational outcomes reflect that.

We once again have failed to fund full-day kindergarten. A promise made, but it hasn't been done. I do not accept, Mr. Speaker, that it's something that we can't do or we can't start working on now. We do have the capital infrastructure to facilitate full-day kindergarten in a number of communities across the province. It is not necessary to put off rolling out that process to next year. We could have started that work in some communities this year, but we didn't want to do it because we didn't want to deal with the fact that it would cost more, and we didn't want to put that into the budget's bottom line.

Special needs. This year the province gave back some money in terms of special needs, and they put in, I think, about a 20 per cent

increase or something. But once you take into account population increase and inflation over the last three and a half years, where special-needs funding has been frozen, effectively all this government did was make up for what they've not been paying for the last four years with special-needs funding.

We have a special-needs education crisis in our education system. The plans that the government has in terms of restructuring it around action on inclusion, frankly, I think are flawed. If you are going to introduce that plan, it actually involves a significant investment up front, and that's not planned for, which means that the action on inclusion is going to be an utter disaster. Our special-needs children will pay the price, and the government knows that.

Capital expenditure. We're not investing enough in building new schools, in maintaining our old schools, and in doing it in a transparent fashion so that it's not subject to political gamesmanship.

Health. It's very possible that we don't need to increase funding in health that much, other than, you know, inflation and population, because it's so poorly managed right now. The problem is that this budget doesn't deal with that. This budget refuses to deal with the chronic shortage of long-term care beds. This budget pays only lip service to the desperate need for more home-care services, and this budget again pays only lip service to mental health services. By failing to invest in that, we are going to put greater cost pressures onto the most expensive part of our system, which is our acute-care system. It's this inaction which is jeopardizing our health care system.

I still believe that the plans that we saw two or three years ago, talking about different mechanisms of allowing for a privatization fee, are still being discussed over there, and I'm concerned about that. [Ms Notley's speaking time expired] That's all I can say at this point, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments regarding the previous speech. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: On 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker. I was on the edge of my seat listening to the member's comments, and I'm wondering if she has more to say?

Ms Notley: Well, I do appreciate that from the member because there were just a couple of points left that I did want to mention.

We still at the end of the day in this province need a child care strategy that actually addresses the growing child care needs of Alberta's young families, and that's not found in this budget. In fact, this budget is yet another example of what this government loves to do. It likes to put just little pittances of money into something and then put almost as much money into the press conference to try to create an impression of having done something. In fact, our subsidy system means that even our lowest income parents are still spending \$400, \$500, \$600 a month on child care if they can afford it, which they can't. The majority of Alberta's families are still paying \$1,200, \$1,300 a month for child care, and that's if they can find it. So we're not dealing with that problem, and I think that's a real concern.

The other issue is that we're not anywhere in this budget seeing any plan to deal with the huge challenge faced by all Alberta consumers when it comes to our out-of-control electricity costs. There is no mechanism in this government to deal with the gouging of Alberta's consumers and business owners arising as a result of this government's ill-informed plan to embark upon deregulation. It's not there. It's unpredictable. I constantly have

people talk to me on the street about how they can't afford this government's mistakes. There's nothing in this budget that is indicating any plan on the part of this government to fix its mistake in that regard.

I think that kind of wraps up our primary concerns with this budget. I'm sure there'll be more that are raised over the course of debate. But I appreciate the time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

If not, we'll move on with the main motion on Bill 7. The chair will recognize Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

3:40

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, here we are at the end of a few weeks of budget consultations and estimates and nice treats during estimates and late night discussions in committee. We're here talking about the final budget.

I first want to go on the record, as others have done, and say how disappointed I am in the lack of democracy and transparency that this House uses in debating and passing budgets. To have 20 minutes, as a member of the third party, to go over a department's budget, some of which are massive budgets – Education, Health, Seniors, many others – 20 minutes to do that . . .

Dr. Taft: You have to share that with the minister.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. Twenty minutes to ask questions, in which the ministers generally take at least half, if not more than half, of that 20 minutes to answer, often not answering it – it just shows how little the folks over there think about this whole process, and it really is something. I can tell you and make a promise that, whoever the government is next time, the Wildrose will support any action that will improve this process, that will give opposition parties the time that they need and private members of the governing party the time that they need to go over line by line, if they'd like to, the different things in the budget to make sure that it is what Albertans want and to get feedback. This government has just been in power so long that it just wouldn't have crossed their minds, I don't think, that that is not democratic. It isn't democratic, and it's wrong.

Of course, this Premier, who talked all about change and transparency, has been as autocratic and untransparent and undemocratic as any of her predecessors if not more. It's a shameful display, and she's paying for it politically right now as is her caucus. I can't tell you how excited we are, Mr. Speaker, here in the Wildrose, to get this election going. We are pumped. We are absolutely pumped. [interjections] I notice that some of the more yippy ones are the ones that aren't running again, likely because they weren't going to win.

Anyway, we're prepared to go to the people of Alberta and, if elected, bring in a budget process next year that is going to be the absolute example in this country of how to pass a budget and how to pass a budget transparently, with input from the opposition and an opportunity for all Albertans' representatives to be able to put feedback into the process instead of just a few select backroom boys and folks around the Premier.

With that, of course, regarding the budget itself: complete train wreck. As the *National Post* said: Alberta's first NDP budget. Absolutely. This is Alberta's first NDP Premier. It is absolutely a travesty.

Ms Blakeman: We'd balance it.

Mr. Anderson: Well, you know what? You're right. You're right, hon. member.

I've got to say that the Manitoba NDP, in particular, is by far more fiscally conservative, more fiscally responsible, than this so-called Conservative government. By far. The numbers back it up in every single way. This government is incapable of budgeting, and then when you call them on it and say, "You are spending too much," what do they do? Just like typical left-wing socialists they stand up and they say: "Oh, you want to cut everybody's programs. You want to throw people out on the street. You don't want Tommy to have any schools." It makes you want to throw up after a while.

It's just incredible that a government that claims that it is conservative, that it is actually conservative, is the opposite of it in every way. They're not conservative. They're not. Forget that label. They're just not fiscally responsible. Period. That's the problem, and that's why they are having so much trouble, and that's why this budget backfired. People looked at it, and they said: "You know what? This is getting to be a joke. We're at \$105-a-barrel oil, and we can't balance a budget? We can't balance a budget at \$105-a-barrel oil. Really?" What a joke. What if oil goes down to \$80? Oh, \$80 a barrel. Imagine. That could never happen. No. If it did, we'd have a hole so large in our budget that you could drive the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's former bus right through the hole in that budget. It's just crazy. You can't budget like this. You can't budget for \$105 a barrel oil and still run a \$3.1 billion cash shortfall, an \$800 million or thereabouts accounting deficit. It's absolutely unthinkable for any kind of government that says it's fiscally conservative.

I know that there are enough fiscal conservatives – I think there are – over there that are disgusted with it as well, but for some reason they don't stand up and say anything about it. They just get along, you know, go along to get along. They don't stand up for their constituents who are telling them to stop spending like drunken sailors.

What would we do differently? They say: "What would you do differently? You would obviously make sure that all the homeless people were thrown out on the street, and you would make sure that all the seniors would be kicked out of all their senior homes, wouldn't you?" That's right. Just like the typical socialist left-wing argument. That's what they say. That's the argument that has Greece bankrupt. That's the argument that has Spain bankrupt, the United Kingdom bankrupt, that has France nearing bankruptcy, the United States on the edge of bankruptcy. Because they act like a bunch of left-wing socialists. They don't know how to say no. They say yes to everything.

You have to in government prioritize just like regular families have to prioritize. You cannot run budget deficits. You cannot call yourself a fiscal conservative like the Member for Edmonton-Calder and act like a socialist. That's what he is. He's a left-wing socialist. He calls himself a conservative. [interjection] But you're not a left-wing socialist, are you? I'd probably trust you. I'd probably trust you with the budget far more than that member.

Ms Blakeman: I can actually balance it.

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely. I'm sure you would. At least you're truthful with where you want to go with taxes. I give you that.

This budget is a travesty, Mr. Speaker. Why do they repeat the same mistakes? Did you not see what happened to Kim Campbell in 1993? Did you not see that? Did you miss that part of history when you had an out-of-control, fiscally irresponsible joke of a

Conservative Party, being the federal PCs, run around and say, "Look how conservative we are," and run massive, massive deficits, raise taxes, raise the institute of the GST without cutting any income taxes, doing anything like that. Just a joke. You can't even call them a Conservative Party.

They go in there, and they get absolutely destroyed, especially in this province. Well, they got destroyed everywhere in 1993, actually, but swept out from this province, the Conservative heartland, so to speak, because they couldn't balance the budget. They replaced their leader with a nice shiny new leader, and – guess what? – she acted in the same way as the former Prime Minister had. Guess what? Same thing here, if not worse.

This Premier is more fiscally irresponsible by far than her predecessor was, and that's saying something because the predecessor wasn't that fiscally responsible. The mere fact that folks over there can honestly say that they have any kind of fiscal credentials is absurd. They don't. A monkey could balance this budget – a monkey could balance this budget – and these guys can't do it. It is absolutely ridiculous.

I wanted to wake people up. It's Thursday, you know. I just wanted it a little bit more lively here. We've got to get through another hour at least.

It is ridiculous. What would the Wildrose Party do differently? Well, the Wildrose Party would do a lot of things differently. Guess what? We think we're going to get a chance to do it differently in about five weeks' time starting. We're looking forward to it. I can't wait. And you know what? The first thing we're going to do is cut some of the absolutely wasteful, disgusting spending by this government.

First thing we're going to do is roll back cabinet salaries by 30 per cent. Then we're going to merge all of the MLA salaries into one, and we're going to roll them back. All the ways we pay MLAs, we're going to roll that into one, and then we're going to roll that back by 5 per cent. We're going to slash by 70 per cent the severance packages, these gold-plated jokes of severance packages that are out there, that are an offence, an absolute offence to the people of Alberta. This government voted a hundred per cent against my bill to reduce them by 70 per cent. We're going to do that as soon as we get back into this Legislature.

3:50

We're going to cut the carbon capture and storage program – \$2 billion gone. We are not going to waste a cent more of taxpayers' money on that kind of stupidity, that kind of just absolute corporate welfare at its absolute worst and absolute most ineffective.

We're going to make sure that . . .

Ms Notley: Is there effective corporate welfare?

Mr. Anderson: There is not effective corporate welfare. You're absolutely right. There is not effective corporate welfare. Thank you for pointing that out. See, you're more fiscally responsible than the folks over there. [interjection] What are we going to do?

Let's talk about health care. We're going to make sure that before we build any new facilities in this province, we have the staff to actually run those facilities. We're not going to just have empty buildings.

Today in the *Calgary Herald*, the Calgary south campus hospital – guess what? – delayed another eight months because they don't have the staff. They don't have the staff. They never planned for the staff. They don't have it in the budget to even pay for the staff, and it's because they don't have a clue how to run a popsicle stand. They couldn't run a lemonade stand if their life

depended on it because they would somehow find a way to bankrupt it. They would drink all the lemonade, give it to all their friends and say: "Why can we not afford to replenish the lemonade stand? I don't understand it. Where did the money go? I want to buy more lemonade, and I can't. Oh, no. What am I going to do? I'm going to borrow some money, so I can buy more lemonade for my lemonade stand." I mean these guys just have no clue. It is just really something else.

What are we going to do on infrastructure? They say: "Oh, you're not going to have any infrastructure. Wildrose won't build anything. We'll just sit there." No. We're going to have one of the most robust building programs in the country, higher than B.C., higher than Quebec, higher than Ontario per person. We're going to beat all of those folks, as we said in our alternative budget, but we're not going to spend so much money that we bankrupt our children over it. We can wait an extra 12 months for some of these projects. We don't have to have everything now because that's what fiscally responsible people and fiscally responsible businesspeople do. They make sure that they don't spend more than they take in. That's what they do.

That's what this government, this PC government, this PC Party that I used to belong to under Ralph Klein and ran for in 2008 when the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville made a promise that he would never run a deficit, that he would never run a deficit in 2008. The promise that we campaigned on as a party was broken every single year over the last four years by him and by his successor. That is a broken promise, and it was unacceptable. You could maybe make an excuse for one year, when the bottom fell out of the market. Maybe in that one year there would have been a need to access the sustainability fund and run that one deficit. But five straight deficits is unconscionable, especially over the last two years when we have been coming out of recession and, frankly, coming out of recession very well because of the high price of oil.

That's what the Wildrose will do. We will continue to build infrastructure on a priority basis. We're not going to be putting up new \$350 million MLA offices. Of course, the damage is already done there. We've already got this building there. Like we couldn't survive in what we have now. As if that was a priority for Albertans while we have a school shortage.

We would make sure that we put the dollars that we did budget for infrastructure into projects that really mattered like highway 63 to Fort McMurray, so we can grease the economic engine of Canada and make sure that we don't have people dying on the roads going up there, and make sure our large trucks can get their equipment up there instead of waiting and dilly-dallying and just doing projects that absolutely are nothing more than make-work projects. Case in point: \$350 million new MLA offices. That has nothing to do with the people working on the offices. Put them to work doing something else. Put them to work building a school. Why on earth \$350 million for new MLA offices? Just ridiculous.

Why couldn't we do with the Royal Alberta Museum that we have for a few extra years? Why did we need a brand spanking \$300 million new one? Why? Because this government can't prioritize. They don't know what the difference is between needs and wants. That's why they failed, and that's why they're going to be replaced in four weeks from now, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Section 29(2)(a) is now available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I think that some of the hon. members' comments are, you know, probably legitimate. Maybe we could

put some things off. But every time the wind blows or it rains, the water comes into my office and floods part of my old office. Maybe we should be working in those sorts of conditions.

An Hon. Member: Plant flowers in there.

Ms Pastoor: I can grow flowers. What a fine idea. Maybe I could grow that flower that has those five little green things.

Well, the other thing is, if the member is talking about a school, maybe we can turn the Leg. Annex into a school and bus the kids in. What do you think of those ideas?

Mr. Anderson: Well, schools are good. I'm a little confused. It almost sounded to me like the hon. member was justifying the \$350 million spent on new MLA offices because she has some flooding. You see, that's the thing.

You know, there's a great story about a group of individuals. They're working at an engineering firm. They noticed that one of the doors on a bathroom stall wouldn't close. They kept trying to jam it in there, and they couldn't do it. So they got all the engineers in there, and they said: "We're going to have to move the whole wall. Then we're going to have to shift the roof because it's one of those hanging stalls. Then we'll be able to close the door." It would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to do, and that's what they were going to go do. Pretty soon, after hearing this back and forth between all the engineers, the janitor came in, took off the piece from the door that was causing the problem, shaved it down, stuck it on, clicked it, shut it, and it worked, not a cost to the taxpayer. That's called the one-inch solution instead of the \$350 million solution.

Instead of replacing the whole building because there are a few drafts and a little bit of flooding, perhaps we can actually do some repairs to the office to make sure that the water doesn't come into your office. Wouldn't that be something?

The Wildrose is always going to look first to the one-inch solution, not the \$350 million new MLA office solution. That's the biggest difference, I think, between the mentality on that side, which is: whatever people ask for, whatever we want, we are going to pay for it now, and anybody who stands in our way, we're going to call them greedy, awful, little people that want to throw people out on the street. That's all we've gotten from these folks.

It's incredible every budget we go through. We've seen that the Liberal Party usually sends out a prebudget outline of suggestions that they have for the budget, and every year I am amazed at how more fiscally responsible their budget outline is than the folks on that side – I don't understand it – with the exception of this last year. I was worried about the tax increase, but they're going to do that anyway just after the election. You were just honest about it, I think. That's the difference.

These folks just have completely lost their way on the finances. They don't know how to make tough decisions. They don't know how to say no. They can't even say no to themselves. They can't even say no to themselves so much so that they gave themselves a 30 per cent increase in their salaries and a 34 per cent increase to their Premier's salary.

They have this ridiculous MLA pay scheme, where you have all these committees. Let's be clear why they have these committees, these no-work committees that we're talking about. Let's be clear what these are. These have been put in place so that the Premier can hold a hammer over top of the heads of MLAs. That's why it exists. The Premier cannot dock pay. The Premier cannot dock anyone's salary, but if an MLA gets out of line, as the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek did right after the last election when she went

after the former Premier as being not well liked in Calgary – guess what? – they didn't give her any committees. Oh, it was punishment for what she said during the election. They docked \$3,000 a month off her pay.

Now, they couldn't do that if it was one salary, you see, but they gave the salary based on committee pay so that the Premier, if someone gets out of line, boom, just puts the thumb down to make sure that they know full well that the Premier doesn't appreciate that. That's why it was set up that way.

That's why we have all kinds of different government committees over there. There are so many different government committees over there that you lose track. Obviously, there are the standard cabinet policy committees. Those are a little more transparent. But all these other ones? Incredible.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is next, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to take a somewhat different approach than the previous member. I'm just going to move on from that. I'd like to talk about the opportunities that we have in Alberta and how I would like to see a different kind of budget and a different approach to a budget.

I want to start from the fact – and I've said this many times in this Assembly and elsewhere – that Alberta is by most measures the richest place on Earth. Of course, we have in this great province a small population. We think of Edmonton and Calgary as big cities, but they're not, really, by world standards. You can put all of Alberta's population together, and it's about half of greater Toronto. It's like metro Seattle.

We have this huge province, a small population, and in addition, you know, to all the wonderful other assets we have here and the fact that geopolitically we're next to the biggest market, the richest country in the history of humanity, we have, depending on how you measure it, the second- or third-largest energy reserves in the world. If you take those energy reserves and divide them by the number of people who live here, we are incredibly wealthy, unbelievably wealthy.

I was actually looking at the corporate filings of Imperial Oil recently, and in their filings they value their energy reserves, what they have still in the ground – they haven't developed it all – undeveloped reserves, at about \$12.60 a barrel. Well, if we just took Alberta's oil reserves, that we own as the people of this province, and valued them at \$5 a barrel, there is over \$800 billion we'd be carrying on the books just at \$5 a barrel. That's more than 20 times the total amount of this budget.

This is by any measure an incredibly wealthy place, and we need to understand that because that puts a real responsibility on us. Too much money tends to make people stupid, and I sometimes think that we're all guilty of that when it comes to managing this province's wealth. This government I've taken to task – and I will continue to take them to task – for ending up in a situation in 2012, with this budget, where having governed the richest place on Earth for 40 years, our heritage fund is worth less than the year it was established once you adjust for inflation. Some \$240 billion in nonrenewable resource revenues is gone.

We're running deficits, and despite the claims of the Wildrose Alliance members we're not spending like drunken sailors, which I think is probably unfair to sailors. We have to do better than what's being done in this budget. I will remind the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere that he talked about bankrupting our children's future by running deficits. Well, there's more than one

way to bankrupt our children's future. Another way is to not educate them sufficiently or to not provide sufficient public services. I think there's a threat to bankrupting our children's future when we let thousands of them go to school hungry every day and we don't do anything about it.

Anyway, I want to address the issue of government spending in the context of the unbelievable wealth that we have here. We are told over and over, as we just heard – and, you know, it's about choice here – from the Wildrose Alliance and have heard from this government and many others that this government is spending a huge, huge amount, leading the country and so on. Well, Mr. Speaker, if you take those numbers and cut away all the spin and you adjust for inflation and you adjust for the fact that our population is growing so rapidly, in most areas we're spending well within the range of what's normal for Canadian provinces.

We're a little bit high on health care. We're not the highest. Believe it or not, Newfoundland spends more. It depends on the measurement you use, actually. By some measures we're the lowest in the country.

On education we're pretty much about where you'd expect to be. There was a ridiculous publication that came out of the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy – it was published in the *Calgary Herald* a couple of months ago – arguing that Alberta's education system should be cut 40 per cent in spending, and it would then equal Ontario. Well, it was drivel. It was ridiculous. It should have been an embarrassment to the University of Calgary that that came out of there. In fact, when you do a proper accounting of Alberta's spending on education, it's about what they spend in B.C. or Saskatchewan or other provinces.

The trend is not a skyrocketing trend. Over the last 20 years, once you adjust for inflation and population growth, health care spending in Alberta has climbed, I think, about 1.7 per cent a year on average. Spending on schools is virtually unchanged compared to 20 years ago. In fact, spending on human services in general has been very flat for the 20 years while the economy has grown in real terms by 70 per cent.

Infrastructure spending is wildly erratic in this province. In fact, too much spending is erratic in this province. From '94 until about 2004 we were spending at the bottom of the country on infrastructure. We all are paying the price for that now: roads that are potholed, buildings like the Legislature Annex and any number of schools and university buildings that leak and cost way too much to maintain.

It's no surprise that the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, when he was Premier, ramped up infrastructure spending. We had to. Even with the increase in infrastructure spending, Mr. Speaker, many of our roads, around half of our roads, in Alberta are going to continue to be in fair to poor driving condition. It's a fact of life that we have to spend money to maintain a modern economy.

I think – and we might overlap a bit with the Wildrose on this and more so probably with the New Democrats – we don't need to spend a whole lot more. An awful lot of the challenges in Alberta come down to fumbling management, particularly in health care. I want to drive this home again. In 21 years – I've kept track – there have been 13 different deputy ministers of health. How ridiculous is that? Thirteen different CEOs of the biggest government department in 20 years: well, no wonder there's chaos. And how many reorganizations?

I'm witnessing, through my family's experience right now, some of the terrible experiences that that disruption in health care has delivered. It's not that we need to spend a lot more; we need to spend smarter. We need to manage it better.

We also – and this is so fundamental for me – need to build up our heritage fund, and that's not happening in here. It's not happening in this budget. How can we live in the richest place in the world and have so little saved and be running deficits? It's terrible management.

The questions that come to my mind, Mr. Speaker. We have such a huge economy – gross domestic product per capita in Alberta is the largest in the world, way beyond not just the rest of Canada but the United States and Europe – yet we have no savings, and we're spending more or less what they're spending in B.C. or Saskatchewan or Ontario. Where's the money going?

Well, some of it is going to individuals, Mr. Speaker. On average Albertans as individuals are wealthier than other Canadians. We're among the wealthiest people on average in the world. That average is very deceptive. The city of Calgary according to both Stats Canada and, of all places, the TD Bank not only has the highest percentage of high-income people of any major city in Canada; it's got the highest percentage of low-income people. That average disguises the most unequal distribution of income in Canada, and not enough in this budget is addressing that.

There are higher personal incomes in Alberta, but they're not nearly what you would expect for such a rich place. What you find when you look at the data from Stats Canada and you really dig into it is that government spending has stayed pretty flat over the last 20 years. Personal incomes are up some, but it's profits collected by corporations that have really soared in this province and are scooping up far and away the largest portion of Alberta's growth.

4:10

I want to put a figure out there that I can back up with very good economic work and that, in fact, I've written about in conjunction with a couple of economists. For the five years 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008, that boom, the Alberta economy on average generated profits, not revenues but profits, of a billion dollars a week every week. That's stunning. That's way beyond any rates in the rest of Canada, way beyond any rates in the United States, way beyond what's normal anywhere else.

What it tells me, Mr. Speaker, is that we are leaving too much on the table. We are giving away our wealth. We're not spending it on inordinate public services. We're not saving it in the heritage fund. We are letting it flow out through our fingers – and we are the owners of this resource – into the hands of shareholders, increasing numbers of whom are in Shanghai or London or on Wall Street or Bay Street.

That's why the Alberta Liberals have called for things like an increase in the corporate tax rate. Our corporate tax rate in Alberta is so far below what's normal in the United States or the rest of Canada or Europe that it's ridiculous, and that is how we are bankrupting our children's future, from the perspective that I take and that the Alberta Liberals take. We're giving our children's future away. We're not bankrupting it by spending too much on schools or hospitals. We're bankrupting our children's future by giving it away to corporations.

Everything I say here I can back up with the best data, unlike some of the ridiculous comments we heard earlier about \$350 million being spent on MLAs' offices. That's a stupid statement, if I may say so. We all know, including the person who made it, that that building holds far more than MLAs. The MLA offices take up a tiny corner of that cost.

Everything that I've said I can back up, Mr. Speaker, and I lay the challenge to the members of this Assembly to rethink how we as an Assembly are managing the unbelievable opportunity we

have. This is one of the last chances I'll have to address this Legislature, so I want to drive that message forward, that we need to do a better job.

I'll see if anybody wants to engage me under 29(2)(a). Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Anderson: Under 29(2)(a) I have a question. I guess I'm confused, and I'm trying to understand. It would make sense that the folks over there would side with the Liberal Party on this. The \$350 million new building – and I agree; it's not all going to be MLAs in there. I agree. There'll be other office workers, other government civil servants, and so forth. Probably a lot of the folks that are in the Annex now, I would imagine, will be moved over there. We have a nice, flashy new outdoor hockey rink and wonderful underground parking and all these tunnels and everything else. Just an honest question: how on earth is a \$350 million new building a priority right now when we have a massive deficit, we have a huge school shortage across the province, and we are building hospitals that have no staff in them.

The south campus hospital, for example. A letter just went out today saying that it's been delayed eight months after just being announced when they were doing that cabinet tour. They said that it was going to be mid this year. Well, it's eight months now. They've moved it back again. All of these things are happening because we don't have enough staff and so forth, yet we have money to redevelop the federal building. How is that a priority? I don't understand it.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, you have about 30 seconds until we have the guillotine vote.

Dr. Taft: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a legitimate question. I mean, I appreciate engaging in an honest debate here. The issues around the mismanagement of the health care system and the fact that hospitals are getting built when we can't staff them is unacceptable. There was a laughable period last June, I

think it was, a particular week in which in the same week the then Premier announced hundreds of millions of dollars for new schools, and 500 teachers were getting laid off. So those are issues of bad management. There's no question about that.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. I do regret having to interrupt the hon. member, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(3) the chair is required to now put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:16 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

For the motion:

Allred	Fritz	Lindsay
Amery	Goudreau	Morton
Bhardwaj	Griffiths	Olson
Bhullar	Groeneveld	Rogers
Campbell	Hayden	Sarich
DeLong	Horner	VanderBurg
Drysdale	Jablonski	Vandermeer
Elniski	Klimchuk	

Against the motion:

Anderson	Boutilier	Taft
Blakeman	Notley	

Totals:	For – 23	Against – 5
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[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 19.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:29 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

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

Activity to March 15, 2012

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

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Results-based Budgeting Act (Redford)

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

Second Reading -- 31-38 (Feb. 8 aft.), 125-34 (Feb. 13 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 124-34 (Feb. 14 aft.), 160-61 (Feb. 15 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 164-65 (Feb. 15 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 5 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 5, 2012; SA 2012 cR-17.5]

2* Education Act (Lukaszuk)

First Reading -- 115 (Feb. 14 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 152-59 (Feb. 15 aft.), 187-88 (Feb. 16 aft.), 182-85 (Feb. 16 aft.), 256-57 (Feb. 22 aft.), 405-11 (Mar. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 500-01 (Mar. 13 eve.), 515-35 (Mar. 14 aft.), (Mar. 14 eve., adjourned, amendments passed)

3 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2012 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 115 (Feb. 14 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 150-52 (Feb. 15 aft.), 161 (Feb. 15 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 185-86 (Feb. 16 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 251-56 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Mar. 5 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 5, 2012; SA 2012 c1]

4 St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act (Lukaszuk)

First Reading -- 236 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 403-04 (Mar. 8 aft.), 480-88 (Mar. 13 eve., passed)

5 Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Act (Jablonski)

First Reading -- 298 (Mar. 5 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 403 (Mar. 8 aft.), 488-94 (Mar. 13 eve., passed)

6 Property Rights Advocate Act (McQueen)

First Reading -- 236 (Feb. 22 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 404-05 (Mar. 8 aft.), 494-500 (Mar. 13 eve., passed)

7 Appropriation Act, 2012 (\$) (Horner)

First Reading -- 513 (Mar. 14 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 586-95 (Mar. 15 aft., passed on division)

201 Alberta Bill of Rights (Property Rights Protection) Amendment Act, 2012 (Hinman)

First Reading -- 69 (Feb. 13 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 299-311 (Mar. 5 aft., defeated on division)

203 Tobacco Reduction (Protection of Children in Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2012 (Sherman)

First Reading -- 69 (Feb. 13 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 427-36 (Mar. 12 aft., passed on division)

204 Land Statutes (Abolition of Adverse Possession) Amendment Act, 2012 (Allred)

First Reading -- 357 (Mar. 7 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 436-38 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)

205 Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act (Quest)

First Reading -- 585 (Mar. 15 aft., passed)

209 Homeowner Protection Act (Hehr)

First Reading -- 585 (Mar. 15 aft., passed)

210 Early Childhood Learning and Child Care Act (Taylor)

First Reading -- 513-14 (Mar. 14 aft., passed)

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