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The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

Alberta Hansard

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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.

Tuesday, March 20, 2012

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have a prayer to say today.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members here some very outstanding students and teachers from a school in my riding of Mill Creek called Blessed Kateri. We have 41 visitors in total. They are joined by their teachers and group leaders Mr. Dan Meunier and Mrs. Anna Primiani. I would ask them all to now rise and receive the wonderful ovation of welcome from our House and all its members. Thank you for coming.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that a rather historic agreement was signed today between First Nations and Northland school division relevant to bringing education to our aboriginal children at the level that we want all of our children to receive, there are a number of leaders who have actually worked really hard for the last few months to allow this to happen. I would like to introduce them. With us today are Chief James Alook from Peerless Trout First Nation, Chief Eddie Tallman from Whitefish Lake First Nation, and Chief William Whitehead from Woodland Cree First Nation. These three chiefs definitely have made children their priority, and I know we will see the fruit of this partnership very soon.

With them today are a dedicated group of individuals who also have been involved in this agreement: Colin Kelly, the official trustee of the Northland school division; Al Rollins, CEO; Billy Joe Laboucan, education director; Donna Barrett, superintendent; and Linda Pelly, director of FNMI services branch.

I would like them all to rise today and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a second one, hon. minister?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, yes. I also have a group of parents who are administering home-schooling programming to their children. They're with the Home School Christian Fellowship. With us today we have a number of parents with their children representing the Home School Christian Fellowship. I would like them all to rise and identify themselves and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. If they're not here, they're probably touring this magnificent building, and they will be with us a little bit later on today.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister of Service Alberta, do you have an introduction?

Mr. Bhullar: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do. You look very fine overseeing question period. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to introduce some members of the hard-working team at Service Alberta. I have Summer Ammar, Dee Carrier, Yvette Chau, Darrelle Cabinet, Margo Meyers, and Sheri Simmonds here in the gallery today. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. It's a privilege for me to serve as their minister. I'm very proud to work with these fine individuals. Thank you for being here. I ask that all members give them the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today a group of 35 visitors from the Yellowhead Tribal College who are seated in the members' gallery. Yellowhead Tribal College is a fixture in the constituency of Edmonton-Calder, and you will unlikely ever find a group of people with a stronger desire to succeed. With the group today is their group leader, Linda Anderson. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly. There they are.

Members' Statements

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

International Marketing

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Access to international markets is essential to increasing the competitiveness of our agriculture industry. Alberta's agriculture and agrifood sector depends on exports, which were worth about \$7 billion in 2010. We are working closely with the federal government, industry leaders, and other provinces to ensure that Alberta's producers and exporters have access to markets to trade their products around the world.

Mr. Speaker, India, China, and Japan are all priority markets for our province, and we have made significant progress in negotiations with all of these countries. India represents a market of more than 1 billion people, and it's one of the world's fastest growing and most important economies.

We also made a breakthrough in market access for beef this year. In January South Korea was the last major market to open its doors to Canadian beef. Before the market closed in 2003, South Korea was our fourth-largest export market, and as of February for the first time since 2003 Canadian processors are able to resume exporting beef tallow to China, a market worth approximately \$50 million per year. As we move forward, Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that Alberta's agriculture and agrifood products maintain a competitive edge over countries such as the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and Brazil.

Mr. Speaker, within the next 10 to 15 years Canada will be one of only a handful of countries producing more food than they consume. Our goal is to make Alberta the preferred agricultural supplier throughout the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Integrity in Government

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, last night the Minister of Education held a telephone town hall with parents and school board trustees across the province. At one point a constituent of mine asked a question concerning why Airdrie hadn't received the two portables our local school board had asked for to cope with the immense overcrowding in our city schools. The Education minister answered as follows: "You know what? I'm really itching to say it, so I will, even though I know I shouldn't, but the first thing you can do is, actually, in Airdrie call your MLA and ask him not to oppose me in the Legislature" on alternative infrastructure funding methods, meaning debt.

Mr. Speaker, this minister is an embarrassment to the office that he holds. How dare you tell my constituents, parents in my community, in the city that I love and have lived in and called home for 20 years, that they can get the school spaces that we desperately need only when their MLA stops advocating for them in the House?

Mr. Speaker, new evidence of the PC culture of corruption are discovered almost every day now, whether it's the Premier's broken promise and cover-up in health care, the Gary Mar fundraiser, the dozens of investigations by Elections Alberta into illegal donations to the PC Party, billions in unneeded power lines with no competitive bidding, the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace's threatening letter to his school board, the fact that no PC MLAs will return money earned on their no-meet committees, and now this, the Education minister threatening parents that they won't get the school spaces they need unless their democratically elected MLAs shut up in question period.

Now the minister laughs. He laughed.

Well, guess what? I won't be shutting up anytime soon. I'll be advocating for the people of Airdrie loudly as long as they have me as their representative.

Bad news for you, Minister. You and your party will not be able to bully and intimidate Albertans when they are in the ballot booth in about a month. This will stop, and it's Albertans who will stop it. The time of this PC government is thankfully about to come to a merciful end.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

1:40 Retrospective by the Member for Medicine Hat

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm rising to address this Assembly for what could be my last time. Like you, Mr. Speaker, I will not be seeking re-election this spring. The decision not to seek a sixth term was almost as difficult as the one I made over 19 years ago to seek a first term. I can only hope that this second decision will provide a fraction of the opportunities for personal growth and learning that I have experienced as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

When I entered public life, I committed to honour and respect the people of Medicine Hat, my family, and my colleagues. But, Mr. Speaker, respect is something that must apply equally to our supporters and critics alike. As I prepare to leave this place, I do so knowing that I have kept that commitment. I have learned that every story has two sides and that every decision has consequences and that sometimes the right decision is not necessarily the most popular decision.

I will have fond memories of the time I spent in this place. I truly believe that members of this Assembly have collectively made Alberta a better place. I'm proud of the role that I was able to play along the way.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the people of Medicine Hat for having the confidence in me over five elections, elections that could not have been successful without great campaign managers, financial supporters, and amazing volunteers. I want to thank the dozens of people who supported me between elections at fundraising and party events; in particular, the members of my constituency board, who year in and year out have been my strongest supporters and, when necessary, some of my most vocal critics.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my family. They have been there for me whenever I needed them to share my successes, to cheer me up when I was down, and occasionally to give me a much-needed reality check.

Mr. Speaker, I extend to you and members of the House my very best wishes in wherever your future leads you.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, the chair also wants to wish you all the best. For the years that I've known you as a member of the Assembly, you are a great MLA.

State of the Health Care System

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has an excellent health care system, one of the finest in North America or the world. However, there is no health care system in existence that does not face significant challenges. Several factors contribute to these challenges. Our population has grown by roughly 700,000 people since 2001, an increase of over 22 per cent. Albertans are living longer and requiring more health care as they age. The costs of technology, health procedures, and drugs have also escalated rapidly. Our challenges include wait times for emergency care and some types of surgeries that are too long. We need more access to long-term care in order to free up acute-care beds. We need more home care to help elderly people stay in their homes longer.

These issues are not going to be solved overnight; however, we are making steady progress. Our province dedicated \$3,860 per person to health care in 2011-12, the highest amount of any Canadian province. Funding for health care is increasing by 7.9 per cent this year. We're making major investments in new acute-care beds. We're investing in primary care networks, urgent care centres, family care clinics, mental health services, and enhanced rehabilitation programs.

Alberta continues to support internationally recognized health research, which is bringing leading-edge clinical treatment to Albertans and to others around the world. We have the best outcomes in the country for treating patients with heart attack and stroke. We have world-class programs in diabetes, cancer treatment, colitis, epilepsy, neonatal intensive care, and many other specialties.

Our government is investing \$25 million in home-care initiatives to keep Albertans in their homes longer. The role of pharmacists is being expanded to allow Albertans another way of obtaining the care they need.

Mr. Speaker, our government will continue working to keep Alberta's health care system among the finest in the world.

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

Armenian Genocide

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 24 of every year Armenians all over the world commemorate the great tragedy of the Armenian genocide because it was on that day in 1915 when 300 Armenian leaders, writers, thinkers, and professionals in

present-day Constantinople were rounded up, deported, and killed.

I commemorate this day each year in memory of my grandparents, who went through this horror in their young lives. I also commemorate the day in honour of all the people – men, women, and children – who have been tortured, who have suffered, and who have died in the massacres of people in the past during the Jewish Holocaust and the Ukrainian Holodomor and people that continue to be tortured around the world in Syria, Rwanda, Sarajevo, Herzegovina.

Mr. Speaker, my question to this Assembly and to the world is: when will this stop? When will we stand up and put a stop to the massacre of people around the world? You know, the only reason that my grandparents survived and the reason I'm here today is because they were loved by the very people that were killing the other Armenians. They were taken into a home, and they were protected and raised so that they could come to America and raise their family. My grandmother and my grandfather survived this genocide because of a Turkish family that raised them with love.

Mr. Speaker, I would say to you that the answer to my question is love and that it has to be great love from the people of the world. Our world can only survive these periods of terror because of just and kind people who have a great capacity to love one another.

My point today to this Assembly is that we must always remember. We must always remember what we talk about in this Assembly all of the time, which is the Jewish Holocaust and the Ukrainian Holodomor, and I raise the Armenian genocide as well. These kinds of torture go on today. We must stand and say: we remember, and no more.

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

Right to Vote

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As Alberta will soon be in an election, it's worth reflecting on how important voting is. Even in Canada voting as we know it is surprisingly recent. Obtaining the vote took centuries of struggle in courts, streets, markets, and meeting halls. At least 20 people were killed in election-related violence in the first half of the 19th century in this country. Among those prohibited from voting have been women, men without land, the poor, Jews, Catholics, Sikhs, Hindus, Chinese, and Canada's aboriginal people.

Earning the right to vote has taken such a long fight because at every step of the way there are those who are opposed to democracy. They felt they knew better than the people or were superior or entitled or that democracy threatened them. The recent robocall scandal suggests those forces have not been vanquished and perhaps never will be.

Canada's courts have often been called on to defend the right to vote. One ruling said:

All forms of democratic government are founded upon the right to vote. Without that right, democracy cannot exist. The marking of a ballot is the mark of distinction of citizens of a democracy. It is a proud badge of freedom . . . every care should be taken to guard against disenfranchisement.

Elsewhere, J.P. Boyer wrote:

Drawing two short lines to form an "X" is the simplest act imaginable. Yet the right to so mark a ballot is as profound as [it] is simple. Such marks, systematically compiled, are transformed by our beliefs and our laws into the most eloquent voice the people have.

Mr. Speaker, may every campaign genuinely respect the right to vote so that the eloquent voice of the people will be heard.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Health Care System

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What good is universal health care if it's universally inaccessible? It's a well-known fact that agonizingly long waits for essential surgeries, emergency care, and 911 calls are due in large part to our seniors being warehoused in acute-care beds because of grossly underfunded and understaffed publicly delivered home care and long-term care. To the Premier. Your plan includes a paltry \$25 million for home care, 30 long-term care beds, and 500 private beds. Why do you persist in supporting a failed seniors' policy which continues to leave our health care system in crisis?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we've had a record of expanding the number of long-term care beds in this province over the past four years, and that's something that matters because we have to ensure that seniors have choice with respect to continuing care in facilities where they can choose to live and receive publicly funded health care.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, given that I'd like to correct the Premier – we actually have fewer long-term care beds today than we had four years ago – and given that the biggest problem is that too many Albertans don't have a family doctor and that only 30 per cent of our medical school graduates are choosing to become one because of this PC government's focus on intimidating doctors, fiddling about with pilot projects, and throwing a few measly bucks at primary care networks on the eve of an election, to the Premier: will you finally admit you don't understand health care? If you don't understand it, you don't know how to fix it.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have right now in this province a tremendous partnership with health care professionals in building a model called family care clinics. Family care clinics are what Albertans want, Mr. Speaker, because what they're doing is that they're providing access for families to people who can be health practitioners and provide them with the access and the information that they need and the health care that they need. Family care clinics will include doctors, licensed practical nurses, and other health practitioners who can provide support to moms and dads who want to make sure that they can get access for their kids not in an emergency room at 11 o'clock at night but in their own community.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure which planet this Premier has been flying to lately.

Given that we've had wildcat strikes and we've had health professionals running ads in the newspapers about the intimidation of leaders and given that you always talk about publicly funded health care but you never talk about publicly delivered health care, Premier, will you please follow the Alberta Liberal lead and commit to investing \$500 million to delivering world-class home care, long-term care, and primary care led by family doctors?

Ms Redford: These suggestions are not new ideas. This is what we are doing in the government of Alberta today, Mr. Speaker. We are investing in home care. The budget, that is before this House to be passed this week, has increased the number of continuing care spaces, it's increased family care clinic funding, and it's ensured that there are additional resources for home care.

Everything must be about access, and we will continue to work with health care professionals across this province on improving the health care system for everyone.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An inadequate answer to a serious problem.

Education Funding

Dr. Sherman: A well-funded education system is the foundation and backbone of our society. In Alberta we have a baby boom and high immigration, which will result in 100,000 more kids in 10 years. We need more teachers and more support for those teachers, and the schools in which they work need to be adequately maintained. Today we have 600 fewer teachers than two years ago. To the Premier. You talk about sustainable, predictable funding, but your three-year plan of 1 per cent/2 per cent/2 per cent fails to keep up with inflation and population growth. Why won't you provide sustainable and adequate funding for public education?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this government is proud of what we've done to support public education in this province, and I'll start by talking about the \$107 million that went back into classrooms in October, when I became the Premier of this province. Our future is public education, and as opposed to the hon. member, who seems to think this is a great problem that we're going to have another hundred thousand students in the schools, I see it as an opportunity. We'll invest in teachers, we'll invest in infrastructure, and we'll continue to grow this province.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, not only has the Premier been skipping out on the Legislature; she skipped out on the last two debates.

To the Premier: given that choice within the publicly delivered education system is a good thing, yet the PCs are funding private schools on a level never seen before, even following the Wildrose's lead in enshrining the word "choice," code for privatization, into legislation, why are you bent on starving our public school system in favour of private, American-style education?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the great thing about Alberta – and it's what we respect – is parents' right to choose how to educate their children. We have a wide range of opportunities, from home-schooling to charter schools to private schools to public schools to separate schools in this province. We support all of them. It's entirely possible to do that, and we'll continue to do that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier is following the Wildrose's lead on privatizing education and given that you've starved the public education system to such an extent that working families are getting nickelled and dimed with school fees and that parents who can't afford these fees are being hounded by collection agencies, to the Premier: will you stop this despicable practice and follow the Alberta Liberal lead by providing public schools with adequate funding and cancel school fees altogether?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, what we have in this province are options for parents to decide how to educate their children. We

have a strong public school system that we as a government are committed to because we believe that it's the future of this province. We also believe it's important for parents to have choice with respect to which schools their children are going to, which programs they might be a part of. Certainly, some of them do involve fees, but those are partly the parents' choices in terms of how we do this. That is key to what happens to the future of education in this province, and that is to give parents the option with respect to how to educate their children.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you still have your third Official Opposition question.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Premier, thank you for being honest about wanting to privatize education.

Provincial Budget

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, oil is at a hundred bucks a barrel and Albertans are working harder than ever, yet working families are getting nickelled and dimed to pay school fees, our postsecondary students are getting nickelled and dimed for tuition and fees, and seniors are getting nickelled and dimed for home care and long-term care. Not only do we have a social deficit; we also have a fiscal deficit. The real elephant in the room is that on top of wasteful government spending, we have a revenue problem. Why does the Premier refuse to show courage and admit that we need to bring in a fair tax that would see the richest Albertans and large corporations bear their fair share?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we're going to pass a budget this week that has no tax increases and no new taxes. We've continued to invest in public education, in public health care, in infrastructure. We've taken care of the most vulnerable people in this province, and we've done it well within a responsible fiscal framework. We are proud of that, and we will proudly not follow the lead of the hon. member's party.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, many of the vulnerable are kids and their families and postsecondary students.

Given that a former Canadian Prime Minister once said that an election campaign is a terrible time to talk about policy and it appears that this Premier is following that Prime Minister's lead, to the Premier: why don't you trust Albertans enough to actually engage them in an honest and meaningful conversation instead of trying to spin out of every important issue?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you that I think that when we get into this election, one of the best things we're going to do is talk about policy because this is a government that has put a plan on the table with respect to a throne speech, a budget, and legislation that's going to allow us to set a path for the future of the province. I'm looking forward to any other political party that might actually want to talk about policy in this election.

The Deputy Speaker: Question 3. Go ahead, hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier, really simple: given that oil is at a hundred bucks a barrel and you're not getting our young people the education that they deserve and Albertans the health care that they deserve, when are you going to get it to them, and when are you going to balance the budget? Premier, when are you going to balance the budget and get the public services we need?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I am really looking forward to what

we're going to be able to talk about in the next couple of months in this province. There's a budget that we've put forward, that we're proud of in this House, that's allowed us to do everything the hon. member has just asked us to do with respect to education, with respect to health care, with respect to infrastructure. We're balancing the budget next year, and that's in our budget.

2:00 School Council Teleconference Remarks

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, last night, when asked by a constituent of mine why Airdrie hadn't received desperately needed portables, the Education minister answered, "You know what? I'm really itching to say it, so I will, even though I shouldn't, but the first thing you can do, actually, in Airdrie is to call your MLA and ask him not to oppose me in the Legislature" on infrastructure funding. I've got to say, Premier, that the arrogance and stupidity of this minister's comment are breathtaking. Will you immediately fire this minister for his inappropriate and bullying comments? Or is this kind of conduct in line with your Alberta values?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I understand that it was a very good discussion last night with respect to infrastructure. That's an important discussion for us to be having right now in this province because when this hon. member's party suggested a \$2 billion cut to infrastructure, you've got to know that that's going to impact schools and that's going to impact hospitals. I think what the Minister of Education said was entirely appropriate. We've got to have discussions with respect to infrastructure. If you cut the infrastructure budget, you are going to cut schools, and we won't do that.

Mr. Anderson: What a spineless answer, Premier.

Premier, you happily accepted the resignation from your former chair of the Cabinet Policy Committee on Community Development, the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, who implied that one of his school boards would be wise to stop publicly advocating for school improvement so vocally. So why will you now not fire your Education minister for blatantly threatening Alberta parents that they won't get the portables they need until their MLA stops opposing him in question period? Why the obvious double standard? Fire this minister. Show some leadership.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, what I understand my minister said was that it was important for us to talk about alternative financing models and it was important for us to invest in infrastructure. If we do those things, we will be able to build those schools. That's an important policy discussion. It's certainly within his purview to make those comments. That's exactly the choice that Albertans are going to have to make in the next couple of months.

Mr. Anderson: Somebody should introduce this Premier to the truth because she can't seem to find it anywhere.

Premier, I'm going to ask you this one more time, and if you say no, this is all that Albertans need to know about your commitment to change and transparency. Will you commit today that you will immediately direct the Education ministry to publicly publish a full list of all requested new schools and upgrades from school boards across Alberta, starting in order from highest provincial priority to lowest priority, as well as the objective criteria used to arrive at that order of priority so that all Albertans can be confident that you are not handing out new schools and upgrades based on politics.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, what we have in this province is a capital plan that sets priorities for communities and schools across this province. Those are based on the best interests of children.

There is absolutely no reason that any MLA in this House cannot advocate on behalf of the communities that they represent. Part of that advocacy is to decide how we're going to pay for these. I know that this hon. member comes from a party that is always concerned about fiscal responsibility. I would say that what our minister did last night is that he introduced some very important issues with respect to reductions in infrastructure spending that would actually impact the construction of new schools. We don't agree with them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Pre-election Commitments

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has arranged the timing of the review of MLA salaries so that no decision will be made until after the election. How typical. She's become a master at delay and diversion, the pinnacle of procrastination for political purposes. From health care inquiries to power rates this Premier's stall tactics are becoming a cliché. My question is to the Premier. Why has the Premier engineered this scheme to make sure that voters won't know what compensation their MLAs are going to get until after the election?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this very Legislative Assembly has requested, because we urged them to do it, an independent report with respect to MLA salary. I emphasize the word "independent." I'll tell you that it's an appropriate method to determine what the compensation should be for all MLAs in this House. We stand behind that.

I took action on that on November 30, within 60 days of becoming the leader of our party and the Premier of this province. I would suggest that any report that is going to be prepared independently by someone as eminent as a retired judge of the Supreme Court of Canada will be released when that person believes that it should be.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that this Premier in yet another attempt to divert attention from a difficult issue has asked for an ethics review of Gary Mar's fundraising activities, yet it appears that little progress has been made, will the Premier commit to making a decision on Mr. Mar's future before the election?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, these questions are quite interesting because what I'm hearing from the opposition, whether we're talking about MLA pay or this issue, what he is urging me to do is to step into the middle of a process that is independently regulated at the moment. We know that right now there is a review going on that is independent with respect to an employment contract in relation to that person. Once that review is completed, we will have the results, and proper steps will be taken. But until that is done, we will respect due process, and we will respect the independence of the process.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that this Premier set up those processes with the explicit purpose of

delaying issues until after the election, I find that very hard to take.

Given that the Premier has promised her developer friends that the cap on long-term care will be lifted so that they can make a bigger profit from seniors and their families and given that the Minister of Seniors now says that a decision on the fees will not be announced until after the election, will the Premier come clean with Alberta seniors and their families and tell them before the election just how much they can expect to be hosed by our private health care partners?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member has suggested something that is absolutely not the case. There has been no discussion or commitment of any kind with respect to removing the cap on seniors' accommodation. Our minister has made that clear. We are going to do what we need to do to ensure that we have a viable and transparent and real dialogue with Albertans about what the future of continuing care will be. What this hon. member has said is absolutely not the case.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Century Farm and Ranch Award

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many years ago the Alberta government introduced a program to recognize our centennial farm families, families that had stayed on their homestead for over a hundred years. It's an incredibly important program, and it's very much appreciated by those pioneers. There are other institutions in Alberta that have contributed a great deal to the farm industry in Alberta. Several of them are reaching or going to attain their hundred-year status also, those being Olds, Fairview, and Lakeland College in Vermilion-Lloydminster. So my question today will be to the minister of agriculture. Would he consider adjusting or maybe amending the program so that these institutions who don't quite qualify under the current criteria would be eligible to receive the same recognition from the province as our farm families?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank that hon. member not only for his question but for his years of service to his constituency and to our province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that that hon. member brought this forward to me as a question, and I've been working on that. I'd like to announce here today that we have instituted a program similar to the Century farm award, and as they hit their 100th anniversary, we will be awarding those three agricultural colleges bronze plaques commemorating that event.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Minister. The Lakeland College demonstration farm actually achieved its hundred years last year.

From the sound in here today I think you would appreciate that there may be an election called soon, so my question to the minister would be: how soon can we proceed with the paperwork and the process required to purchase and present these plaques?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Berger: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We have instituted the program, so this year we will present the plaque to Lakeland College. Next year the Olds College will celebrate its 100th anniversary.

I want to congratulate all of these colleges for their production of thousands of good agricultural producers across our province. These are the people that provide the food for Albertans and millions of other people around the world on a daily basis.

2:10

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, as we had the opportunity and the privilege to present these plaques, we heard some incredible stories from these pioneers. My next supplemental to the minister would be: would he consider making available to MLAs or people in his department the opportunity to film and record some of these stories so they can take their rightful place in the archives of Alberta?

Mr. Berger: Mr. Speaker, that's a wonderful suggestion. I think it's something that we need to do, and I would make that part of the presentation, that we have those stories put on the record and kept in archives as well.

Thank you to the member.

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

Edith Cavell Continuing Care Centre Collective Bargaining

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Human Services minister. For the third time in a year this government has flexed its muscles and intervened in a legitimate bargaining process between workers who feed and care for our seniors and a private seniors' care operator, the Lethbridge Edith Cavell Care Centre. Despite these centres receiving public dollars to allow staff salaries equal to those at Alberta Health, the employer has refused to give salaries equal to those in Alberta Health Services. Surely dissatisfied staff and frequent turnovers do not serve seniors' interests. Why is the minister repeatedly disrespecting the bargaining process and the nursing and support staff?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, always in life there are value choices that people have to make. In this particular circumstance I choose to stand on the side of the people who will be harmed by labour action. The evidence is clear that moving frail seniors is not in their best interests, and if there's not a good plan in place to take care of those seniors in the event of strike action, that's exactly what a dispute inquiry board is intended for.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware of such a wage disparity between employees in this institution and Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's neither appropriate nor my role to interfere with the collective bargaining process in terms of how they come to their wages, only to ensure that third parties are not inappropriately affected. By putting in place a dispute inquiry board, the parties get to continue to discuss the wage levels and then reach a contract. That process will continue and, hopefully, will reach an appropriate conclusion negotiated between the two parties. In the meantime I refuse to allow frail and elderly seniors to be affected by the labour dispute.

Dr. Swann: New workers come in during strikes, Mr. Speaker.

Coming just before an election call, this clearly shows that this government will do anything to hide uncomfortable issues. How many more can we expect of these ham-fisted interventions in established labour processes?

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member can expect no ham-fisted interventions because there haven't been and there will not be ham-fisted interventions. The type of intervention we have is looking very carefully at the situation to determine whether third parties will be inappropriately affected, where their lives would be at risk, where their health would be at risk. That's what we do, and that's why there are appropriate processes like dispute inquiry boards to be put in place. I'm not aware at the moment of any other circumstances where a strike vote is imminent or has been taken, but one has to look at each situation on its own merits to determine whether innocent third parties will be harmed or affected before a decision of that nature can be made.

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

Productivity Alberta

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta businesses are an important part of the continued growth of our economy. My first question is to the President of Treasury Board and Enterprise. What is the government doing to help our businesses become more competitive and efficient?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday morning I was involved in a joint federal-provincial announcement at Tyco Thermal Controls regarding Productivity Alberta. Productivity Alberta is a not-for-profit corporation that works closely with businesses to help them increase efficiency and to help promote investment and attraction and best practices in our province.

In response to the recommendations that were made by the Alberta Competitiveness Council, the government of Alberta – I announced this yesterday – is providing \$7.3 million to support the work of Productivity Alberta over the next three years. As well, our federal colleagues contributed \$3 million through Western Economic Diversification because they believe in it, too.

Mrs. Leskiw: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the same minister. Can you elaborate on the work that Productivity Alberta does? [interjections]

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. members from the Wildrose Alliance don't like productivity, but we're going to work on it.

Mr. Speaker, Productivity Alberta's board includes senior leaders from Alberta's most innovative production companies such as Tyco. They work with industries throughout Alberta to assess their business practices, to explore ways that they can become more effective and efficient and profitable and productive. Those advisers work one-on-one with the companies to see where they might be able to add some value into what they're doing and help link businesspeople with the information and the resources. That's improving energy efficiency. That's improving a number of areas in their business.

Mrs. Leskiw: My last question is to the same minister. Funding is one thing, but concrete results are another. You say that they are

making a difference. Can you give specific examples of Productivity Alberta's success?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you about McLevin Industries. McLevin is based in Red Deer. It's a family-run steel fabrication business, and many of their business practices were done manually and were very time consuming. After working with Productivity Alberta, what they've been able to achieve is a new software system. They've been able to improve their inventory tracking, their production on the floor.

Mr. Speaker, when you have productive small enterprises, you're going to attract more investment. You're going to build more economy. You're going to create a bigger pie. That's how this province is going to grow, by us helping small businesses be profitable.

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

Home-schooling

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing a society does is more important than educating its children, but this government is caving in to a very noisy minority who would like to see Alberta's education system fragmented into tiny bits and have the taxpayer cover the costs. To the Minister of Education: given the direction the government is going with public education, what is to prevent the public funding of a school of Scientology or Druids or a school for witches and Wiccans?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I won't engage in that kind of dialogue because people in Alberta, Albertans, make choices on the education of their children, and I would never compare any parent who is choosing to home-school their child to being involved in witchcraft or whatever the member may be suggesting. Let me tell you one thing that is important. We have a piece of legislation on this floor that will be amazing for more than 600,000 children in this province, that will unleash 21st century education, that will curb bullying, and the list goes on and on. It would be a shame to not pass this legislation for the benefit of our kids.

Mr. Hehr: Given that yesterday the minister stated that there is nothing more important to him than giving parents "choice and the ability to teach what they want, when they want, and where they want without any interference from government," is the minister comfortable with parents teaching that homosexuality is a sin or that evolution is not real?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I do find it somewhat troubling that the member would actually go on record and suggest that parents are into witchcraft at home or teaching kids some horrible things. As a matter of fact, as a parent I'll tell you that when I come home . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate the courtesy of being able to answer the question.

The Deputy Speaker: The minister has the floor.

The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: I'd like to ask the minister directly about his apparent lapses or his delving into teachings at home. Is the minister comfortable with parents teaching at home, when they're teaching the education curriculum, teaching things like homosexuality being a sin or that evolution is not real?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Please, listen to the answer. I am comfortable with the fact that parents have the right of teaching their children and passing on their family values, their religious beliefs, and their morality. This is what we do as parents. Whether my daughter comes from a public school or whether she stays at home all day long, I still take responsibility for teaching her what is right and what is wrong, so that aspect has nothing to do with home-schooling. That is what we all as parents have the primary right to do, and we continue doing that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:20 Provincial Tax Policy

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Albertans enjoy the lowest overall tax regime among all provinces. However, my constituents are concerned whether the upcoming fiscal framework review will include an increase in taxes.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's understandable why this hon. member's constituents might be a little confused because we do have a party out there that's advocating for higher taxes, and they advocate in this House on a regular basis. We also have another group of individuals that sort of masquerades as a party that is spreading rumours out there that there's going to be a tax increase. So I'm not surprised that his constituents are confused. But Budget 2012 clearly states that there are no new taxes this year, next year, or the year after.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. Some are arguing that raising taxes would be a quick way to produce additional revenues for the province. Is the minister considering raising taxes in some areas to increase government revenue?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I know that there is one party – and then, of course, there's another party way over there with a couple of members – that advocated that we increase royalties a few years ago. A number of Albertans were also asking that. We did that, and it didn't work very well, so what we need to do is focus on creating a bigger economic pie instead of trying to find different ways to carve up the existing pie.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is regarding taxation on Alberta businesses. To the same minister. Other provinces are lowering their tax regime for businesses so that their rate is below Alberta's. What is Alberta's response to their efforts?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this is not a race to the bottom to see who can have the lowest tax regime. What it is, really, is to ensure that there's a fair tax regime that . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The minister has the floor.

Mr. Liepert: You're darn right I do, Mr. Speaker.

This is ensuring that we have a fair tax system that encourages investment. Let me give you a figure that just happened to be released today by the Royal Bank of Canada. This shows that we have the right taxation system, Mr. Speaker, because last year,

2011, 99,000 jobs were created in Alberta, more than half – more than half – of what was created in all of Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Caribou Habitat Protection

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently I asked why this government took first place as the single biggest killer of bears in the province. Now I have to ask why it is fighting for the title of the single biggest killer of wolves. Instead of doing what every expert knows needs to be done to save the caribou, which is to protect its habitat, this government employs the antiquated policy of murdering wolves to slow the caribou population decline. To the Minister of SRD: why does the minister consider the slaughter of wolves and bears an acceptable option when it is clear that habitat destruction is the problem?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we've spoken about the very unfortunate killing of bears, and I want to make sure that Albertans understand that that has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with caribou. The unfortunate interaction of bears and humans and the interests of protecting public safety is what caused the unfortunate shooting of bears last year. As the hon. member knows, I've already asked for a review of the policy governing camp allocation and how much my department monitors camps to make sure it can't happen again.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Well, the minister knows that culls are a short-term Band-Aid solution which doesn't address the fact that the caribou have nowhere to go and nowhere to live. How is this government going to address the real problem, that the caribou are being pushed out by development?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, actually, I would agree with the hon. member that the culling, or the control, of wolves is a short-term solution and not likely to be successful in the long term. But given the current circumstance of my being unable to plunk new habitat on the landscape, the wolf program will be an effective short-term solution, and it will only be used as a short-term solution.

Ms Blakeman: Well, back to the same minister. I'm not hearing a long-term solution, which has to be working with the oil and gas sector to make sure that there are corridors to allow the caribou to move about and find a new habitat. All I hear is that you won't use the cull unless you have to. What are you actually doing to fix this problem long term, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the member hasn't been around for the last few years, apparently, to listen to things like the land-use strategy, which sets aside new protected areas for caribou, talks about connectivity on the landscape. More to come.

I don't know why that member insists on this American style of questioning, but it's not fruitful.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

First Nations Education

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the components of the Minister of Education's 10-point plan includes supporting First Nations education. More often than not, First Nations schools

operate in isolation without the necessary educational supports that are available to provincially funded schools. This has affected the learning environment and ultimately the achievement of First Nations students. First Nations students are Albertans, and they should receive the same top-notch education as other Albertans. My question is to the Minister of Education. What in the world are you doing to change this situation to ensure that First Nations students get a top-notch education?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is definitely right, frankly. Not only in Alberta but throughout our entire dominion what has been done in however good faith for the last 150 years simply has not worked. Our aboriginal population deserves the education that we all expect our children to receive in Canada and particularly in Alberta. That is why today in the gallery we have a group of leaders, education leaders, both chiefs of local First Nations and educators who are willing to look outside the proverbial box and start delivering education to aboriginal kids in a way that is collaborative and will yield results.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister, then: how soon will these supports become available to the First Nations schools in that area, especially in the constituency of Lesser Slave Lake?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, starting now. These leaders that I referred to have signed an agreement right now. As a matter of fact, our federal minister of aboriginal affairs, Minister Duncan, and I are willing and are interested in assisting in making sure that this collaboration and this agreement is a successful one. We will be lending our educational resources; the federal government will be lending their federal aboriginal relations resources. We know we have a group of aboriginal and education leaders who are all in collaboration and will make sure that we turn this agreement into a success.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, given the fact that agreements like this are so important, no matter what happens, to ensure that aboriginal students get the same kind of education as other Albertans, to the minister again: with this type of agreement how is it going to impact other First Nations communities in this province?

Mr. Lukaszuk: I certainly hope that First Nations and other colleagues in provincial governments and elsewhere are looking at this model. This is, indeed, innovative, and it shows that when you have three orders of government together with a school board working together and making children, and children only, their priority, good things can happen. There is no reason why aboriginal children cannot benefit from the same educational and economic benefit that we expect the rest of our children in Canada to benefit from.

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

School Council Teleconference Remarks (continued)

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bullying, the intimidation, the cover-ups, and the culture of corruption continues to expose itself every day. Billions handed out for untendered power lines experts say we don't need. Doctors have been bullied and intimidated. Grimshaw was told to keep quiet if they wanted school repairs. Now, today, we have a Minister of Education who has been really itching to tell the parents in Airdrie

that the best way to get the desperately needed school portables is to have an MLA who doesn't oppose him. Really. This culture of corruption continues day in and day out. Now, when will this Premier show some real-life leadership and ask this minister to retire?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has answered this question already in the House. I would just add that the MLA in question has obviously been very opposed to us looking at alternative financing for things like schools and like hospitals and other things. Their party has already said that they're going to take \$2 billion out of their phantom budget. That would mean that there would be no schools, no hospitals built in some areas around the province.

Mr. Hinman: That's absolutely offensive. This is about school portables, not on running government debt.

Is the Minister of Education going to hide behind the complicit Premier, who continues to deny to Albertans that a rampant culture of bullying and economic intimidation exists, or is he actually going to do the honourable thing and follow the example of the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace and hand in his resignation today? Now. Stand up, and hand it in now.

2:30

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you of one thing that I will do. I will stop telling the truth about them if they stop telling the lies about me.

Mr. Hinman: And this guy talks about bullying. He's an embarrassment to the whole school system.

Given the importance of leading by example for our children, especially when it comes to bullying, and given that this minister accepted the broadened definition of bullying to not just students but to everyone included in the school system and given that this minister refuses to do the honourable thing and hand in his resignation for his disgusting and unacceptable comments, Madam Premier, fire this bullying minister today.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, just listen to the language and look at the demeanour, and that tells you everything. It is unfortunate that an elected member of this Legislature cannot talk with parents or Albertans, actually musing about different ways of building schools and delivering schools today for kids that actually need them today and not later. Look at how upset it makes them. Look at what foul language we have to listen to simply by introducing an innovative idea.

Mr. Speaker, I won't stop doing that. I will continue doing that, and I will make sure that it comes to fruition so that our kids get the schools today that they need today.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Trucking Safety Regulations

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year Alberta Transportation introduced a commercial driver's abstract to include information on drivers' nonmoving safety violations like badly secured loads and mechanical problems. Now I'm hearing complaints from truck drivers that the system is unfair because it punishes the drivers for the owners' mistakes. To the Minister of Transportation: why do safety violations that are not the drivers'

fault, such as broken safety belts, show up on the drivers' commercial abstracts and not on the company's record?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I need to make it very clear that the safety of our highways is the primary focus and direction of our ministry, whether it's building roads, whether it's looking at the traffic counts and seeing how much traffic is on the highways, whether it's distracted driving, whether it's impaired driving, or whether it's the safety of the vehicles or trucks that individuals drive. It is about the safety of our roads, and it is about the safety of the equipment that is on our roads. We will continue to do that. We have looked at many different, innovative ways of how we can work with companies to ensure that companies self-police the fleets that they have. It is working very well.

Mr. Kang: Well, Mr. Speaker, if it's working very well, then drivers would not be complaining to us here.

To the minister again: given that a U.S. investigation recently found that thousands of freighting companies were breaking the rules by forcing drivers to be on the road for longer hours, what is your department doing to make sure that companies are following safe practices?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does make a point. When we look at the length of time that drivers are allowed to be on the road in Alberta and on a national basis, the national basis allows drivers to be on the road for an accumulated amount of 13 hours. In Alberta we have 14 hours. We try to accommodate the oil patch, and we try to accommodate the individuals that are driving in our area, but at the same time we very much have to look at the safety for the rest of the people that are on the roads.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: given that Albertans travelling on highways want to know trucking companies' safety records, will your department consider posting company safety records online like AHS posts restaurant health inspections?

Mr. Danyluk: You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure of the extent of the comments of the hon. member, but he definitely got my attention, and I'd be willing to talk to him about it because I'm not exactly sure where he's going.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to say to you that the trucking industry and the Alberta Motor Transport Association work very hard to ensure the safety of other people on the roads and the safety of their drivers. Anything that we can do to encourage that safety, anything that we can do to enhance safety inspections for vehicles, that would address problems before they happen, and to do testing, we're going to do. So I would very gladly meet with the hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Student Finance System

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We all know that when you have a prosperous and booming economy like we do here in this province, there are a number of challenges that go with it. Certainly, meeting our skilled labour shortages is one of them. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education

and Technology. We put a lot of effort into getting students into our universities, making sure that they can afford them, building the appropriate spaces, but what are we doing to make sure that when they've completed, they stay and work here in Alberta?

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question. It is a challenge as we see that we're going to have some labour shortages across the province, so keeping our brightest and best here is so critically important. First off, to attract students here, we have one of the finest postsecondary systems and great student supports and also consistent three-year funding for our postsecondaries, which provides the kind of stabilities that students want to see. The other thing is that we have some of the best communities to live in and some of the best workplaces to work in in the country, so this attracts and keeps students in the province. We're also working to ensure that students have the specific kind of training that they need.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've heard a number of students indicate over the last little bit that a number of students are leaving because other jurisdictions are providing attractive incentive programs. My first supplemental to the same minister: what is he doing about this? You know, grants are fine, but what else can be done to make sure that they stay here?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have made some significant changes to our student finance programs. We've made it easier for students to get involved by removing parental requirements. We've created a flat contribution of \$1,500 in lieu of earnings. No longer do students have to spend their RRSPs prior to getting an education. We've created a new and unique program, which is our retention grants, which will allow us to give students that stay in this province in selected fields grants for staying here that will help pay off their loans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. We know that the future of our economy is a knowledge-based economy, so what is the minister doing to attract more graduate students here to this province?

Mr. Weadick: Well, Mr. Speaker, actually, attracting the brightest and best graduate students is one of those challenges that we do face, and we're working very closely with all of our universities to try to attract the brightest and best grad students. You may not know it, but Alberta has some of the lowest graduate student tuitions in this country. They are significantly lower than other provinces. We just recently changed our student finance so that graduate students that are studying part-time can access student finance so that they can gain the necessary funding they need to be able to come here and work. We also are looking at jobs and opportunities for graduate students to work and gain experience while they're here.

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

Water Management

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years this sorry government has rejected the scientific, evidence-based, peer-reviewed research of Alberta's leading water quality expert, Dr. David Schindler. Schindler, who has chastised the province over its water mismanagement from the Athabasca in the north to the Oldman in the south has recently been exonerated and embraced in the hypocritical hope that his credibility would make up for this government's lack thereof. To the Premier: having finally recognized Schindler's credentials, why aren't you immediately implementing his water protection strategies?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment and Water has met with Dr. Schindler and is discussing the best way to proceed to respond to the comments he's made and, in fact, does have a monitoring program under review.

Mr. Chase: It's actually time to stop monitoring and to start fixing.

Why, despite Schindler's warnings, are you allowing over half of the Castle's meagre forest to be uprooted, damaging the watershed on which all downstream users from Beaver Mines to Lethbridge and all the way to Medicine Hat are dependent?

2:40

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

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The situation in the Castle is, in fact, that we not only incorporated the watersheds in the planning of the harvest there, but we've been monitoring, and they show that the watersheds are, in fact, extremely healthy. The modelling that we've done, projecting harvesting forward, by an independent body at the University of Alberta has actually predicted that there will be absolutely no measurable effect on the watershed.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the Minister of SRD: given the moratorium on issuing water licences in our southern watershed, will you table the studies which indicate that clear-cutting in the Castle and Bragg Creek areas is economically and environmentally sustainable with negligible negative impact on the rapidly approaching 2 million adversely affected southern citizens of this province? Show us the evidence. Table it.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, that hon. member clearly wants to revisit the land-use question in this province. At the moment the Castle harvesting and, in fact, all of our forest harvesting is the result of a decision taken by previous governments. We have the land-use decision open right now in the South Saskatchewan, and then there will be the North Saskatchewan, and then there will be the upper Athabasca, and then there will be the upper Peace. All of those land-use decisions are open for revisiting, so I invite those hon. members to participate.

I would point out that if they wish to indulge in their dastardly plan to tax corporations, first you have to have corporations.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before we go further, I just want to recognize some news here. The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House and the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake are celebrating their 23rd year in the Assembly today.

There were two points of order raised during question period, so I will deal with those after.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 15 I would like to circulate a copy of a motion for a point of privilege at this time. I'll let it circulate first, and then I'll read it into the record.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling five copies of correspondence to the MLAs for Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Strathcona, and Calgary-Fish Creek as well as the written responses to questions from consideration of the main estimates for the Ministry of Culture and Community Services that took place on the evening of February 22, 2012.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, do you have some tablings?

Ms. Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings, actually. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Wanda Ziober of Sherwood Park. She writes: "Thank you for your concern in our energy bills. Please find mine as it has doubled." Her February 2012 bill for electricity was \$503.50.

I also have the appropriate number of copies of a bill and an e-mail from Cindy and Gilles Sergerie of Okotoks. They said that they have "hopes that something can be done about this burden placed on the residents of Alberta." Their January 2012 bill was \$593.47.

I have a note from Corey Myer of Chestermere, who sent us an e-mail where he said, "Pretty soon we might as well get out the candles and sit in the dark." His bill for January 2012 was \$505.14.

I have the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail and a power bill from Jim and Sharon Bleaney of Calgary. Jim wrote: "I . . . truly believe deregulation has done nothing for the majority of us . . . it was designed for 20% of the customers who purchase 80% of the power." Their electricity charges for February 2012 were \$206.42.

Ben Biro of Athabasca sent his EPCOR bill for January 2012 in the amount of \$446.41, and I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of his letter, which says: "I feel sorry for those on fixed incomes. This for me has been devastating."

Mike Shkrobot's bill for February 2012 was \$1,066.87. I have the appropriate number of copies of that.

I have the appropriate number of copies of a bill from Andrew Spisak of Edmonton. He had an EPCOR bill for January 2012 in the amount of \$439.80.

I have a bill and a note from Walter Kostyniuk of Wabamun, who's a senior citizen who's unable to pay his power bills in full now. His electricity charges for January 2012 were \$199.30.

Reuben Coleman of Athabasca sent us a bill from February 2012 in the amount of \$178.55.

Marvin Serediak of Edmonton sent us his EPCOR bill for February 2012. His electricity alone in that month cost him \$160.72.

Leighton Thompson of Calgary sent us his bill for January 2012 where his electricity charges were \$206.59.

Edwin Matthews of Forty Mile county sent us his February 2012 bill in the amount of \$924.12.

We also received an EPCOR bill from S. Erhardt of Edmonton, whose electricity energy costs for February 2012 were \$173.54.

Lawrence Berland of Lac La Biche sent us his North Parkland Power bill from January 2012, and the total was \$342.81.

Kevin Nutt of Pickardville sent us his January 2012 bill in the amount of \$662.95.

I'll leave it at that for the moment, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to table from 10 individuals, with the appropriate number of copies, who are very concerned about the lack of treatment, lack of resources for those with mental illness due to cutbacks in beds, staffing, funding, and resources for appropriate programming and community housing, placing everyone at risk, from front-end workers such as police and mental health workers to the community at large, and, more importantly, violating the Charter of Rights for the mentally ill by warehousing them in prison systems without proper treatment.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please, briefly with the tabling.

Dr. Swann: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, you wish to table?

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from an Albertan from Daysland, Deb Kirk. Deb is with the Concerned Neighbours in Partnership. Of course, they are very concerned relative to the issue of property landowner rights and democratic rights that they believe have clearly not been represented by this government. They're asking for the repeal of Bill 19; as well as Bill 23, the amending portion; the Alberta Land Stewardship Act; and its amending Bill 10; as well as the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, Bill 50; and also the carbon capture and storage bill, Bill 24. She is submitting these names – and I might add that there are 387 – for restoring property and democratic rights of Alberta landowners.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am 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. They are requesting a complete, facilitated, and accessible public consultation: Sol Castro, Peter Baltais, Dr. David Rival, Scott Diehl and family, Cody Mitchell, Raemie Brown, Nancy Brophy, Colette Novicki, Kevin Griffiths, Mike McKinney, Daryl Ann Dorosz, Sarah Robison, Carole Richards, Peta Stuart, Kendall Selk, Craig Adolph, Trace Dyfolt, Sherman Mah, Jackie Boyd, and Steven John Dueck.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Finance, pursuant to the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans regulation Provincial Judges and Masters in Chambers Registered and Unregistered Pension Plans annual report for the year ended March 31, 2011.

Pursuant to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension

Plan Act the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan annual report for the year ended March 31, 2011.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

2:50

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues. I'm very pleased and very proud to introduce to you and through you today to all members six individuals who work in the health policy and service standards division of Alberta Health and Wellness. This group plays a very important role in all areas of planning for our health care system, and their skills and leadership and expertise contribute significantly to strengthening policy capacity within my ministry. Here with us today are Afiba Aku, Shaughnessy Fulawka, Tamara Kulyk, Claire Neeland, Chrissy Searle, and Richard Thorne. I'd ask them to please rise and receive a very warm welcome from the Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. One is a group of three truly amazing women: one who gave birth to me, one who puts up with me, and one who gave birth to the woman who puts up with me. Santosh Sherman is my mother of 46 years. She came to this country as a young immigrant woman with three children. She was pregnant. She has worked hard, tirelessly, to feed me and my brothers, to give us hope, to encourage us when our spirits were dashed. Interestingly enough, she actually sewed the uniforms for the Edmonton Oilers when we were the city of champions. I'd like my mother to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. This is also the first anniversary of our father's passing, when God took our father. Thank you, Mom.

I would also like to introduce you to Sharon McCrary, who is my life partner, who has helped me go through the past few years. You know, we've had good times and bad times here in the Legislature. At the end of the day she is the rock and the foundation of my life to help me serve Albertans. Sharon, thank you so much for everything that you do for me so that I can serve Albertans. Another truly amazing woman is Rita McCrary. Rita is Sharon's mother. Rita, I thank you so much for raising such a wonderful daughter. I couldn't do what I do without her. Thank you to all three of these fabulous woman. Please give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I also met a wonderful woman in the lobby of the Legislature. Her name is Margaret Saunter. Margaret is an advocate for seniors, and she's been fighting for better care for our seniors. Please give Margaret the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have two points of order raised by the Government House Leader. Point of order number one.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During question period today – I think it was in the second set of questions, if I remember

correctly – the Leader of the Opposition referred in his question to the absence of the Premier, basically a process that has been ongoing over the last few days. I think it appropriate under *Beauchesne's* 481(c) to remind the hon. member that referring to the presence or absence of a member in this House is not parliamentary.

There's a reason for that. It's not simply that we don't want to tell on each other. It's because we acknowledge the fact that as MLAs, as cabinet ministers, as the Premier we work very hard and we have lots of different duties. We engage in committee work, we travel the province, we meet with people, and it's not always possible for everybody to be in their chair at every moment of the day.

The Premier has acquitted herself remarkably since her election as leader of our party and since she was sworn in as Premier of this province, and it's entirely unseemly for these continuing references to absence. I would ask you to remind hon. members that under 481(c) of *Beauchesne's* referring to the presence or absence of a member is inappropriate.

Now, there are appropriate times when you can refer to the absence of a member, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the Wildrose Alliance had an opportunity to run for election, chose not to, and is therefore not in this House. That's an appropriate time to refer to absence.

But with respect to members of the House we are elected to serve in this House. We're called to be here when the Legislature is in session, but it's also understood that there are times when members are absent, and it's unparliamentary to refer to their absence.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the point of order.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. Thank you very much to the Government House Leader. Yes, indeed, he has given the correct citation under 481(c) referring to the presence or absence of specific members. But as I go through a number of other citations, the *House of Commons*, page 614, for starters, it is intended to be the observation of the presence or absence of members currently, not whether they were here last week or three months ago. It's meant to be the current absence because, as the Government House Leader has said, they could be out of the room at this moment for any given reason, including some rather embarrassing personal ones, and that's just not fair. We don't know why they're not here.

More to the point here, Mr. Speaker, is that the leader was extemporizing off of the questions that he had in front of him and was referring specifically to the absence of the leader of the government in education debates, which took place in Calgary in the middle of February and in Edmonton on March 17 and 12. She, in fact, ended up being the only leader of a political party that did not participate in those educational forums, and that is what he was referring to.

We do not have the benefit of the Blues – I don't; I don't think the Government House Leader does either – but if it sounded like he was referring to a current presence or absence, then I would respectfully withdraw those comments. Clearly, that's not what he intended. He wanted to specifically address the absence of the Premier at the debates, of which there have now been three opportunities for her to appear and to debate the education policy, which is of such interest to everyone in Alberta right now and, as the Premier says, of such interest to her. It was very puzzling as to why she forewent any opportunity to have attended these three different debates. She was in fact invited to participate in them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On the point of order, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: I have to stand up because generally this House leader tries to articulate, and I don't know whether it was because I was engaged in two conversations, but if I heard him correctly, he was trying to say, you know, where we can and can't talk about someone missing.

To bring up the leader of the Wildrose and say that she failed to run to be in this House is ridiculous. Maybe the Blues will later show, but that's what I thought he said. It's just remarkable how he's complaining about someone else talking about his leader, and then he turns around and, with hypocrisy, starts talking about other ones. I'm just amazed.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others?

The chair shall now make a ruling here. It's a relevant citation from the House leader, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 614: "Allusions to the presence or absence of a Member . . . are unacceptable." The same principle is stated in *Beauchesne* 481(c).

I heard the House leader of the Official Opposition mention something like: withdraw the comment if that's the case. I think that it has been clarified that we should never ever in this House call a member by name or allude to the member's absence.

Hon. member, let's do the second point of order.

3:00

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, earlier today in question period, this time during questions being raised by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, he used the language, if I caught it correctly – and I believe I'm quoting him – "introduce this Premier to the truth." Increasingly we have had a deterioration of the language of the House. We've started spiralling down in this House. I've been reluctant to raise points of order because it really just gives people another opportunity to vent themselves and doesn't have much of a useful purpose, but there are times when you actually have to intercede. The citation that I'd be referring to would start with 485(1) of *Beauchesne's*, and I also would refer to the Speaker's memo to us of January 27, 2012.

We have a fairly high calling here. Eighty-three members are elected to represent and serve the people of Alberta at any given time. That number will be increasing to 87, but it's still a very modest number of Albertans who have the privilege of serving this House. Part of the privilege of serving this House is the responsibility that goes with it to encourage public discourse, to bring people into the debate on public policy, to raise the level of discussion about what kind of a province we want to have, where we want to go, what kind of a place we want to leave for our children and grandchildren.

One of the things that has been one of the pieces that I have desperately wanted to achieve while I'm here is the raising, not the lowering but the raising, of the public appreciation for the role of elected representatives.

Mr. Hehr: You talked about Danielle Smith not running for election, and now you go on that rant.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member says that I talked about Danielle Smith not running for election and that then I go on that rant. There is nothing wrong with pointing out . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there is nothing wrong with having a public debate and pointing out salient truths. One doesn't have to do it in a mean-spirited, nasty way. One doesn't have to profess to be Christian and then be un-Christian in their actions. One should carry their deportment in an appropriate way at all times. If we want the public to respect the work that we do as legislators, then we should be standing up for what we do as legislators, and we should be using parliamentary language.

Now, to get to the point, Mr. Speaker, "introduce this Premier to the truth" is no different than suggesting that she's lying. It's no different than using any one of these terms that have been ruled unparliamentary in the past – "it's the Premier that is not telling us the truth," "never tell the truth" – all of that twisting of language around truth and lies.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better than this. We can have honest discourse and disagreement. We can have fulsome disagreement on public policy without degrading the debate to the level where we're calling each other liars, using terms like "corruption," and bringing the level of discourse down to where nobody will want to participate.

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

Mr. Anderson: Well, that was a stirring, stirring speech by the House leader. Unfortunately, as he correctly pointed out, what I said is that I would like to introduce the Premier to the truth on a matter. Now, I would like to introduce the Premier to the truth on what I think should be done in education. I should like to introduce her to the truth on what I think we should be doing with democracy. To somehow say that introducing the Premier to the truth is using unparliamentary language is absurd. What are we doing in here if it's not to introduce each other to each other's viewpoints on things and our different solutions for problems and so forth?

In the current situation we had some horrible remarks given by this Minister of Education to parents in Airdrie, threatening them – that's what it was, threatening them – specifically saying that if you want your two portables a little quicker, you go talk to your MLA and tell him not to give me any pressure in the House over different infrastructure funding models. This person here, who's the minister, has the audacity to say that, to threaten parents in my constituency and then turn it around . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, on the point of order.

Mr. Anderson: Oh, absolutely.

I'm asking the Premier here to – I'm trying to introduce her to that truth. I'm not even talking about the Premier; I'm talking about this minister. I'm trying to introduce to her the truth about this minister, who has been threatening parents in my constituency. If that's not the point of question period, to ask her for her comments and her answers to what her minister and what members of her government are doing, then why do we even have question period? Obviously, I can introduce this Premier to the truth on this matter if I feel it's appropriate. It's within my right as an elected member of this Assembly.

Obviously, we would all like to raise the level of discourse. We would like over here, for example, Mr. Speaker, to actually get answers to the questions that we ask. We would actually like some answers. I asked three direct questions today of the Premier and got exactly zero answers, not the answers I wanted. I just didn't get an answer. She didn't even answer the question.

Again, I'm trying to introduce the Premier to the truth about this minister. How that can be spun to say that I was calling her a liar or something like that is a figment of this House leader's imagination.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, the chair heard both sides of the argument. There is a lot of clarification in there. I would just want to make all members aware that it is inappropriate to accuse another member of falsehoods, and that interpretation or hinting or whatever, directly or indirectly, should not be. It is inappropriate. Probably you well know, relevant to the citation, Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), unparliamentary language; *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 618 to 620; and *Beauchesne's*, paragraphs 485 to 492.

Now, as I heard all of that debate on the point of order, I just want to emphasize again that all of our members should be reminded that their language should be temperate, should be consistent with the long-standing tradition of respecting the House and the integrity of all of us. So tone down the wordings. Thank you.

The other matter that we have to deal with is a Standing Order 15 motion. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Privilege Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion in question is that

pursuant to Standing Order 15 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a point of privilege; namely, that [the Minister of Education's] comments last night, March 19, on a conference call to educators to the effect that if the people of Airdrie want the school space they need, they should get their MLA to quit opposing the Education minister on the question of infrastructure in the House constitute a breach of privilege.

First, I'd like to lay out the facts, most of which are not in dispute because there is an audioclip, located on the Ministry of Education's website, where you can clearly hear what the Minister of Education said on the conference call – so this is not in dispute – in an answer to a question.

The minister was having a telephone conference call with educators, school board trustees, parent council members, and, I'm assuming, others across the province of Alberta last night. During the course of this call, after the minister's remarks, apparently there was an opportunity for some questions and answers from the audience listening. In Airdrie they were at a building, and around a telephone there were the following people. There was the president of the Airdrie Council of School Councils, Mr. Steve Goodall. There was the chair of the Nose Creek elementary school parent council, Mr. Gerry Pappararo, and there were many others. There were several of our school trustees from Rocky View school division there and so forth.

Mr. Pappararo, who, again, is the Nose Creek elementary parent council chair, asked a question into the conference call. It was simply this. He asked: Minister, we've had roughly 30 – he gave a number, whatever it was – portables announced by the Ministry of Education to be sent out to different areas of the province to deal with school overcrowding; in Airdrie the Rocky View school board requested two for Airdrie.

3:10

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, let's go back to the motion that constitutes the breach of privilege that you brought up.

Mr. Anderson: With due respect, I have to give this background

or else you can't explain what happened, so I will do so. I will hasten my explanation, but you have to understand what happened in order to understand what the motion is about and how it interfered with me in the House, with my work as a member in this House.

He asked the question to the minister, saying: why did Airdrie not get these two portables that we asked for for our well-documented overcrowding of schools; because we didn't get these, is there anything we can do in order to speed up the process of getting these portables or getting these portables at all and, of course, getting our new schools? That is the question that Mr. Papararo asked, essentially. The exact quote can be taken from the minister's audio on the website.

Now, in response – and this is the exact quote – the Minister of Education said:

You know what? I'm really itching to say it, so I will, even though I know I shouldn't, but the first thing you can do is, actually, in Airdrie . . .

The first thing you can do in Airdrie in order to get your portables, in order to get your schools, because that's what the question was about.

. . . call your MLA and ask him not to oppose me in the Legislature every day on considering new ways for funding infrastructure.

Now, he went on after that. There were more questions from other people, and he answered them, apparently. About an hour later Mr. Papararo asked again: did you mean, when you said earlier – were you actually saying that if our MLA continues to speak out about this, we're not going to get our schools?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Read what he said.

Mr. Anderson: He wanted to clarify the comments. Let's put it that way. He wanted to clarify the comments.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Why don't you read the transcripts?

Mr. Anderson: I did read them. You know what? You should be so embarrassed at yourself right now; you should just shut your yap.

The Deputy Speaker: You have the floor. Speak through the chair. You have the floor. Explain through the chair.

Mr. Anderson: Incredible. Just absolutely unbelievable. This guy is just unbelievable.

The Deputy Speaker: Explain through the chair.

Mr. Anderson: Anyway, he can table the transcripts himself. You know, he's gotten so wound up here.

The Deputy Speaker: Explain through the chair.

Mr. Anderson: Okay.

Mr. Speaker, what happened is that after this occurred, he clarified and backtracked and tried to explain his comments: no, that's not at all what I meant; I hold Airdrie up as an example, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. He backtracked about an hour later when asked again about it. Okay? We will give him that, that he did backtrack.

Mr. Hinman: His preamble said that he shouldn't say it.

Mr. Anderson: That's right.

As to the motion, in section 69 of *Beauchesne's* it says the following:

It is very important . . . to indicate that something can be inflammatory, can be disagreeable, can even be offensive, but it may not be a question of privilege unless the comment actually impinges upon the ability of Members of Parliament to do their job properly.

Now, it is very clear that this minister said in his comments – or it's certainly an interpretation of what he said by the person asking the question. Certainly, to that person it is very clear that one interpretation, a very clear interpretation of what he said, is that because I have been advocating in this House about the need for additional schools in Airdrie and because I have been constantly going at this . . . [interjection]

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

Mr. Anderson: How about the hon. member over there? Could I continue on? The House leader, the former Education minister, seems to want to get in on this, so I'm just checking.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that it's a very clear interpretation of that, and you can see it from all of the different – just look at the e-mails, the Twitter comments, the blog comments. Just go through it all. Many people have interpreted that comment to mean that one of the reasons Airdrie did not receive those portables is because their MLA is in this House advocating very strongly for new schools and is opposed to going into debt in order to finance new schools – okay? – is because of my political position, because I'm arguing that, no, we shouldn't go into debt to fund new schools, we should pay as we go, we should pay for what we can afford, we should pay for only what we need and, you know, not for just politics and throwing money around like drunken sailors, only build what we need, because that's my position, because that's what my position is.

And I agree. You can have a different position. That's all right. That's okay. But the implication of that statement was that because I have that position and I've been speaking in this House about that position, the people of Airdrie are being penalized with a lack of portables and schools.

That's what the implication clearly, clearly was. And it was made very clear by the fact that he said, "You know what? I'm . . . itching to say it." He's itching to say it, itching to say it. "So I will, even though I know I shouldn't." He shouldn't do this. So he knew full well what he was saying. He knew full well what he was saying. He had a lapse. He forgot. He's, like: darn. Maybe he wasn't thinking the call was recorded. Maybe he was trying to be extra smart or something or clever.

The Education minister is laughing as he usually does. Minister, it's incredible. It's okay. He'll be very lonely over here in a couple of months.

The fact of the matter is that this individual said these things and has caused major feelings of intimidation in these members, who contacted me subsequent and who couldn't believe what they had heard. They thought that they were being threatened, saying: if your MLA continues to advocate, you're not getting your schools or your portables. That was the implication.

If you go to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 108, under Freedom from Obstruction, Interference, Intimidation and Molestation, it says, "Speakers have consistently upheld the right of the House to the services of its Members free from intimidation, obstruction and interference." It's a pretty basic principle.

Section 75 of *Beauchesne's* concerns the freedom of speech, that I believe is so important to members in this Chamber, which I would think surely includes, above all, the freedom to speak up for your constituents, the freedom to advocate for them and the needs

of their children. That's important, that freedom of speech that we all enjoy here. It states in section 75, "The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member of Parliament on the floor of the House and in committee." "The most fundamental right" is what it says. Well, I feel, clearly, like I am no longer free to speak on these matters because it may affect my community's ability to obtain the schools and the portables they need.

The Education minister is still laughing, by the way.

Section 92 of *Beauchesne's* states, "A valid claim of privilege in respect to interference with a Member must relate to the Member's parliamentary duties and not to the work the Member does in relation to that Member's constituency." Let's read: "A valid claim of privilege in respect to interference with a Member must relate to the Member's parliamentary duties" – okay? – "and not to the work the Member does in relation to that Member's constituency." One of the parliamentary duties that we have certainly of the opposition members, is to come into this House and to ask questions of the government. That is one of our duties. That is a duty that we have. And if we are being punished or if the communities we represent are being punished because of questions we are asking in this House, that is a clear breach of privilege.

Section 99 of *Beauchesne's* elaborates on this issue of threats, saying that "direct threats which attempt to influence Members' actions in this House are undoubtedly breaches of privilege." Section 99. I'll say it again. "Direct threats which attempt to influence Members' actions in the House are undoubtedly breaches of privilege."

3:20

I'm asking you, Mr. Speaker, if that's the case – I'll tell you right now: I do feel threatened. Now, how I choose to respond to that threat and that intimidation is certainly up to me, and I will do so in a way that I feel is best, and this is one of the ways I'm doing that. But make no mistake about it. I do feel threatened. I do feel that my constituency right now – because, clearly, you can't trust this minister. If this is what he's saying on a conference call, can you imagine what he's saying behind closed doors? Can you imagine? Well, we have an idea because in a moment of weakness when he kind of . . .

Mr. Hinman: No. Arrogance.

Mr. Anderson: Arrogance or whatever you want to say.

He said, I know this is wrong. I know I shouldn't be saying this. But if you want schools, you'd better tell your MLA to shut up. Okay?

Mr. Hinman: Just like Grimshaw.

Mr. Anderson: Just like Grimshaw except – you know what? – no, it's worse. This is the Minister of Education. The language used by the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace was not as harsh as the language used by that minister, not even close.

The Education minister is laughing still.

Section 93 of *Beauchesne's* goes on further. It's very unambiguous. Section 93, page 25, of *Beauchesne's*.

Mrs. Forsyth: This is when you zip it.

Mr. Anderson: He doesn't understand that. He's embarrassed, and he'll be paying a political price soon, I'm sure.

It states that "it is generally accepted that any threat, or attempt to influence the vote of, or actions of a Member, is breach of

privilege." It is generally accepted that any threat or attempt to influence the vote of or actions of a member is a breach of privilege. Mr. Speaker, this is an attempt. He was, essentially, telling . . . Look, this is a breach of privilege. I need to finish. I'm almost done, but I need to get through this, Mr. Speaker, so I ask for your patience.

In that comment it is very clear if you look at the actual transcript. "You know what? I'm really itching to say it, so I will, even though I know I shouldn't, but the first thing you can do is, actually, in Airdrie call your MLA and ask him not to oppose me in the Legislature."

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member . . .

Mr. Anderson: Now, Mr. Speaker, telling me that I cannot speak in the Legislature is appalling. It is interfering with my rights of free speech. So in conclusion – okay?

An Hon. Member: He's got to be timed out here.

Mr. Anderson: That's good. You'll be leaving soon, hon. member, and we'll all be better for it.

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

Mr. Anderson: Pending the finding of the Speaker that this is a prima facie case of privilege, I seek to move that the matter of privilege concerning the Minister of Education's comments about the advocacy for myself be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing. This committee in question could use a little bit of work, so why don't we refer this matter to that committee . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you have used . . .

Mr. Anderson: . . . and actually get a fair hearing about this matter so that I don't feel interfered with?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the hon. member that I think you have used over 10 minutes on the point. Have you concluded, hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere?

Mr. Anderson: Yes, I have.

The Deputy Speaker: You have. Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on this point.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A point of privilege is a serious moment for this House as we consider whether behaviors that have been taken or chosen somehow impede the ability of any member to fulfill their duties in this House is serious.

My observations on what is before us is that there are three parts of it: intimidation, freedom of speech, and coaching constituents to be angry with their elected official because they are doing their job. They all culminate, in my belief, in a serious breach of privilege.

I just want to check a few things for you, I hope as assistance, Mr. Speaker. In looking at the definition of intimidate, we have: to force into or deter from some action by inducing fear. The comments from the Minister of Education in a broadcast, I believe, were meant to direct constituents, to influence the behaviour, and it was based on fear. They are trying to get something. They are told they can't get it unless they make their member stop a certain course of action.

There are a number of places where that is brought up and spoken very harshly of. In *Maingot* he directly talks about that. Any form of intimidation or act of violence of a person for or on account of his behaviour could amount to contempt. It is intended that none of us be threatened in trying to go about our duties. For opposition members – and this is my interest in this case – part of our job is to oppose the government, to criticize them, to bring things up, to advocate on behalf of our constituents. To have any member exposed to intimidation or threats, especially by a cabinet minister, is very serious.

When I look at the ability and how important freedom of speech is – and in this case, Mr. Speaker, it is the freedom of the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to advocate on behalf of his constituents, to bring up in this House, hopefully with tempered language, his desire to have certain things done for his constituents. That's his job. His ability to have that freedom of speech is very critical, and to have it blunted or dimmed or for him to have to feel that he needs to take a step back in his pursuit of that because his constituents or himself have been intimidated or threatened is unacceptable to any of us in this House, I would hope, particularly to members of the opposition.

The freedom of speech is written a number of times. It's in the *House of Commons 2009* edition:

... a fundamental right without which they would be hampered in the performance of their duties. It permits them to speak in the House without inhibition, to refer to any matter or express any opinion as they see fit, to say what they feel needs to be said in the furtherance of the national interest and the aspirations of their constituents.

That is right on point, Mr. Speaker, and for anyone to attempt to influence through threat or intimidation the constituents to then threaten or intimate the member directly or indirectly or to do it directly or indirectly to the member should be unacceptable to this House. I ask that, in fact, the member do find that there is a prima facie case of privilege here.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Lukaszuk: I'll let the opposition member speak first.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for allowing me to rise on this issue. I will be brief. I simply as House leader for the NDP caucus would like to rise and provide my support to the submissions that have been made by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere as well as the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Simply put, the ability of members to advocate within the rules of parliamentary conduct for their constituents is a fundamental component to the work that we do within this Legislature. Any efforts to interfere with that, any effort that is attached to the influence of government, in particular, is a threat to that privilege, which is profound and meaningful.

In this particular case the member in question actually utilized the resources of government in order to deliver a message to citizens of the province, who would then presumably interfere with the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere's ability to communicate and express himself in the way he felt best within this Assembly. The fact that government resources were used in delivering that message, that that message was delivered in a telephone town hall funded by the Ministry of Education that included the constituents of the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, is disturbing to me, Mr. Speaker, and I think that it leads us to a

very slippery slope that will significantly undermine the work of MLAs, all elected members in this Assembly, and the independence with which we do that work.

So I would ask you to consider that there is a prima facie case here and that the matter be referred to the appropriate privileges and other things committee for further consideration. Thank you.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, not only do I want to, but I feel compelled to speak to this matter.

I would agree with the members of the Liberal and NDP opposition that no member at any point in time should ever feel inhibited from being able to carry out his or her duties in this House. That is the fundamental principle of this House.

However, Mr. Speaker, if one was to hear only what the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere had to say and assume that that was all that was said and take this in exclusion, perhaps – perhaps – one would even agree with the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. But I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this member this time around is taking a great deal of poetic licence with what he is presenting to this House. As a matter of fact, I don't know if one could rise on a point of order on a point of privilege, but he's been attributing a lot of things to me that simply haven't happened.

Let's put this all in context and see what happened. Then we'll allow the Members of this Legislature to decide what happened. This goes a little bit further back because as you know, Mr. Speaker, just a couple of weeks ago I was on behalf of the Department of Education defending estimates, the budget, for the Alberta Legislature while the member was asking for portables and mentioning infrastructure. We went back and forth, back and forth, on infrastructure. I will quote from *Alberta Hansard* of that debate on March 6, 2012, roughly at around 5:45 p.m. I said to the member:

I will ask this member, referring to the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere,

and actually his entire party to be a little bit more open minded and co-operative on the issue of how we fund schools because there's a great deal of opposition coming from that corner of the Chamber on anything that resembles debt or debt financing.

The fact, Mr. Chairman, is that we need to look collaboratively at new ways of funding schools.

So, I actually said that on the record, that I'm looking forward to him being more open minded and more collaborative with myself and my ministry so that we can look at ways of building more schools for areas that require schools. To which the member responded:

Well, I'm always looking for innovative ways to build new schools, but I'll tell you that I do not feel that debt is innovative. There are lots of ways to do things without mortgaging people's futures, and it's called reprioritizing. How many schools would that new MLA office across the way build, for example?

Then he goes on, saying:

Anyway, I'm glad that he's passionate about building new schools. That's good. But we should never sacrifice the needs of the here and now on the backs of future taxpayers. I just disagree fundamentally with that. I think you prioritize.

Then he goes on to say in the next paragraph:

I have to explain this all the time to the House leader, referring to the Solicitor General.

He never understands,

clearly saying that he does this all the time, and he argues with the minister all the time.

He says: do I have a mortgage? The difference is that after I pay the mortgage, I have a house that's worth something, that I can sell on the market if I need to. You can't sell a bridge, can you? Can you sell a bridge? No, you can't. So it's a big difference, a huge difference from a mortgage. It's just debt. In fact, the bridge actually costs more money to maintain as we go forward. Anyway, we're getting off track. I have this discussion with the House leader all the time. It's totally different.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, there is a history of this member standing up in the House and objecting to this government looking at any possible way of financing schools – and it also is relevant to portables – other than paying cash up front.

Well, let me take you, Mr. Speaker, to the telephone conversation in question. I should maybe give you a little bit of background. I have these conversations every month and a half or so with parents from across the province. Anybody can dial in; anybody can say whatever they want. They all hear each other. It's free of charge, and it's open to all parents. Frankly, media call in, and I'm sure – maybe MLAs do. I don't know if they do. Only parents ask questions, and I try to answer as many as I can. We have a frank discussion on the telephone.

So yesterday at 4:38 p.m. a parent – I'm not sure what the parent's name was because I don't remember. We have all the conversations, by the way, recorded. It is me who records those conversations, and then I post them on the Alberta Education website for everyone to hear. If any member would like to hear the audio, it's there right now. Transcripts are also available so everybody can read them.

A parent says, "We're just curious about . . ." Sorry. I will be tabling, Mr. Speaker, all these relevant comments. Just bear with me for a second if you will. A parent said that a

school division [in] Airdrie asked for eight portables, which we really needed to get us through to 2014, and they were denied . . . we know 40 new portables were approved but none for RVS. How do we go about getting the infrastructure and the capacity, interim or permanent, for our constantly growing community?

Then I said to that:

You know what? I'm really itching to say it, so I will, even though I know I shouldn't.

The reason I said "even though I shouldn't" is because I usually like to keep my answers – and you look at all the tapes – to factual questions and answers. But this was asking for advice, so I'm giving him advice.

The first thing you can do is, actually, in Airdrie call your MLA and ask him not to oppose me in the Legislature every day on considering new ways for funding infrastructure.

That is exactly what I have been referring to earlier.

That really is the problem.

In this province and in every province in Canada we are building schools up front, cash. And it doesn't matter how rich your provincial government may be; there are only so many schools that you can build using this cash up front model. And, frankly, I see nothing wrong with looking at alternative models, where you amortize the cost of new schools over 20, 30 years [and you can build] for kids right now.

I know in Airdrie you probably need five . . . schools to accommodate your current population and growth . . . [for] the next few years. But the way to achieve that: we will have to look at alternative financial models and not be bound by ideology.

But . . . in Airdrie-Chestermere . . . the Rocky View school division is receiving two portables for Prince of Peace Lutheran school, Muriel Clayton middle school is receiving two, George McDougall high school is receiving two, and Rainbow Creek

elementary school is receiving two . . . So you are receiving eight portables in total for your catchment area.

Then the conversation went on, and the parent went back online as well, and nota bene, Mr. Chairman, no parent has been offended by the comments, and the conversation carried on for about an hour. Later the parent says:

We're just curious about the comments you made earlier regarding Rob Anderson and the constant bantering back and forth. We're curious: how does that affect parents in our community and our needs for extra schools?

To which I responded:

You know what? Not at all. I'm actually using your city and your area as a flagship. Every time I get asked a question about needing schools I always mention Airdrie, Fort McMurray, and Grande Prairie. Those three [areas] are prime examples of where schools are badly needed. You know, we are all grown up, and yes we [are] politicians [and we] pick on each other from time to time and we have definite differences, in this case ideological differences on how schools should be built, but at the end of the day as a minister and as a parent I can never lose focus of the fact that this is all about kids and kids only, and kids need schools.

Sorry, but I have to use the member's name.

I know that Mr. Anderson also believes that kids need schools, but we just have a different view on how those schools should be built. I know for a fact that paying for schools cash up front has proven itself to be a failed model. That is why we are where we are. It simply doesn't allow any province to build enough schools.

Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, I gave credit to the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, saying that he agrees with me that we need to build more schools. I'm the first one to acknowledge that Airdrie and, actually, another Wildrose riding, Fort McMurray, and the third one, Grande Prairie, are the three flagships that need schools. Frankly, Airdrie probably needs about five schools right now, and the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere agrees on that. I agree on that.

3:40

The last time I was there, I had a gym full of parents and almost got a standing ovation from parents when saying, "We need to look at any way possible to get you schools right now." That member's constituents actually are attending school right now in Legion halls and in church basements and the list goes on and on, which to me is unacceptable and, I imagine, to every member of this Legislature is unacceptable.

So all I was saying is that we agree on that, but where we differ is on the ideology. I believe we need to amortize the cost of schools over a period of time; he believes we have to pay for schools cash up front. I believe that the only way to build a lot of schools is to do it my way, and I believe that if we were to do it his way, we would be digging ourselves deeper and deeper into the backlog of infrastructure. That's so the parents know.

What I told the parents is: maybe you should be calling your MLA and have him change his mind so he works collaboratively with us and the Chamber on finding new, innovative ways for funding schools. If that in any way impedes this member's performance in the Chamber, I find it unusual. If having to dialogue with his own constituents or having his constituents call him at his office impedes his ability to perform in this Chamber, I find that unacceptable.

Frankly, you know, it's quite interesting because that particular political party has been asking not only my constituents but individuals from all over Alberta and the United States to call my office and twitter my accounts on issues relevant to the Education

Act, and I don't feel that my performance is impeded. As a matter of fact, it informs me further.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a silly season. It's pre-election time. I realize that any angle is a good angle at this point in time. I have never heard more vile verbiage in this Chamber.

I suggest to you that this was a very appropriate comment to make, and I have said that comment on the record many times before, and I didn't see anything inappropriate before. As a matter of fact, I complimented the member for being a good advocate for his constituents because he's asking for additional schools.

I'll end with that.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. Hon. Government House Leader, do you wish to join in?

Mr. Hancock: Very briefly, Mr. Speaker. The question before us is whether what we've heard in detail from both sides of the House now is a question of privilege. A question of privilege, as the hon. House leader of the Official Opposition indicated, has to be something which impedes a member's ability to do his or her job.

In fact, what we've heard from both sides of the House, essentially, is somebody suggesting to a constituent that they should talk to their member. There is no way that one can characterize asking a constituent to talk to their member, even if you're asking them to talk to their member to change their mind about something, as impeding that member's ability to do their job. In fact, it's enhancing the member's ability to do his job. It's saying: "Look. We need to find new ways to do things. Your member is talking about cutting the budget, and the Wildrose has talked incessantly about how we should spend less on capital. Well, the problem and the discussion that we've had back and forth over time, over the last two years, is that if you do that, it's going to take longer to get things built if we do it the traditional way."

The member very clearly is talking to Albertans, as is our job, to encourage Albertans to talk with their members, which is what we do every day, and encourage those members to think about the impact of the positions they're taking. That's political discourse. We need to have more of it, not less of it.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the chair has heard elaboration on the matter. We have spent close to an hour on this, and there is the business of the day to deal with. So the chair will consider the matter and rule at a later date.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 7

Appropriation Act, 2012

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Deputy Premier and the President of Treasury Board and Enterprise it is my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2012.

Over the course of the past few weeks both inside this Assembly and outside the Assembly there has been credible discussion about Budget 2012. It has gone through thorough debate in this House, and I would say some less than truthful statements have been made outside this House. There have been allegations leading up to this particular budget that it would

include tax increases. Of course, that was proven to be wrong. The same group of individuals who said that tax increases were going to be coming in the budget but were proven wrong are now trying to allege that there are tax increases in this budget. Of course, anyone who reads this budget and can understand any sort of financial accounting can read that there are no tax increases in this particular budget. So again there is wrong information being spread out there. I'm glad that we've had the opportunity to fully debate this particular document in this House.

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

This budget, by the final passing of third reading, will ensure that we meet those commitments that the Premier has made. We are also ensuring that we're going to have a health care system that is appropriately funded, and we'll continue to deliver a health care system that, despite the protestations of some of the members of the opposition, is highly respected in this province, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we have some people who may have certain agendas that they are pursuing out there in the public. That's fine; we'll deal with that. But we have committed funding to Alberta Health Services as part of our five-year funding agreement, a 6 per cent increase in funding this year. In addition to that, the overall budget of Alberta Health and the minister of health is 7.9 per cent. That goes a long way to ensuring that we're going to be able to start to finally move to family care clinics.

I know the minister of health has talked a lot about this. A period of time ago this government attempted to have the primary care networks deliver team-based care in this province, and it hasn't worked as well as it should. There continues to be resistance by certain health professionals to ensuring that the patient comes first despite a lot of rhetoric that we might hear out there, and what we're going to do with the family care clinics, Mr. Speaker, is ensure that the patient comes first. This budget will allow the funding for I think it's three pilot projects in this budget year, and then, hopefully, we're into a number of permanent family care clinics as we move on.

Of course, we've just had a lengthy debate under this so-called point of privilege, which I know that the Speaker will consider very carefully, but we've also more than adequately funded the Education budget for this province. In addition to that, we've got a significant capital program, which is going to be seeing not only more roads but more schools and health care facilities built under budget 2012-13.

Probably core to this particular budget, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that it's entitled Investing in People. If you look at what this budget does in the way of increasing the funding for AISH recipients, that's going to kick in fully at \$400 a month on April 1, so it's important that we get this budget passed through this Assembly today. That will make a huge difference in the lives of many Albertans. I think I heard the Minister of Seniors talking this morning about some 46,000 Albertans who rely on payments from the assured income for the handicapped program. This is going to make a huge difference for them.

In addition that, Mr. Speaker, we have addressed a number of the areas that low-income seniors consistently are struggling with. There are enhancements there. There are also enhancements for young families whose children are in daycare, where both parents are working. Those are going to be increased significantly.

This really is a budget, Mr. Speaker, that does deal with the human issues. I'm confident that it's a budget that reflects what the President of Treasury Board and myself in our travels across the province last fall heard from Albertans, where they want us to focus on health and education, and they want to ensure that our

critical infrastructure is maintained and improved. Despite what you may hear from some of the individuals who masquerade as a party over there, Mr. Speaker, they do not want us to cut back on our critical infrastructure spending.

3:50

You know, it's one thing to stand up and play politics with numbers, Mr. Speaker, but when you play politics with numbers, sooner or later you actually have to delve into what is the impact of those numbers. It's just wonderful for certain people to stand up both inside this House and outside the House and talk about cutting \$2 billion out of the infrastructure program and then, on the other hand, turn around and have a point of privilege in this House and say, "Well, that didn't mean me and my constituency; I should have the ability to advocate for my constituents," and when speaking in front of another audience will stand up there and say, "This government spends too much on infrastructure." Well, Mr. Speaker, you can't have it both ways. This budget lays out a fair plan. It's a responsible budget.

I guess the final point that I would like to make in asking for the support of the House on third reading of this bill is the fact that we've managed to not only deliver a budget this year that has a small deficit, which is covered off, we need to point out, by the sustainability fund, but we've also introduced a budget that has a three-year business plan that shows our budget being more than balanced next year. In fact, it's projecting a budgetary surplus of about a billion dollars.

You know, if we continue to see the strong economic performance of our province, if we continue to see oil prices in the range of where they are today, I think we're going to see much better results, and it could be even in this current fiscal year. It could definitely be in the fiscal year that this budget covers and probably even in years out.

For individuals in the opposition to go out there and use terms like that we're using fantasy numbers for our budget is irresponsible, Mr. Speaker. This budget is based on firm data. It's not our data. It's the data of international forecasters when it comes to the price of oil. It's the data directly from industry when it comes to the production levels of their oil sands plants. It's firm data from the Finance department, who are now seeing that because of the high oil prices many of these projects that have chosen to invest in Alberta are now going to be reaching the postpayout, where the royalty scheme will now kick in much earlier than we had anticipated.

This is an incredibly good-news budget, Mr. Speaker. It's one that I was proud to introduce. It's one that I know all members have supported and I believe a large majority of Albertans have supported. I would ask that we pass third reading of this particular budget so we can get on to implementing the various measures that are contained within this budget.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere will postpone, so we'll go ahead with the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are three problems with this budget: what is contained within it, what isn't contained, and then the process through which the budget was built and debated.

For the past seven budgets that I have been a representative of Calgary-Varsity, the problem has been that the average amount of time the Official Opposition gets to debate a particular budget is in the area of three sets of 10 minutes, which they can take or share

in a 20-minute session with the hon. government ministers. If there is an opportunity towards the end of the three-hour session, during which millions of dollars are being discussed every minute, then there's the possibility of a portion of another 10 minutes. So the maximum amount of time an Official Opposition member gets to debate the budget, all being well, is 40 minutes. When we're discussing multibillion-dollar budgets such as Education, such as health care, that amount of time is not sufficient.

With the rushed session that we're experiencing, the answers to the questions that were not able to be answered on the spot during those evenings will not be provided to the members prior to an election and, therefore, will not be available to the public to judge the value of the budget or the debate on the budget. That's been disconcerting for me, Mr. Speaker, for the last seven years. We are asked to debate budgets of, I believe, over \$30 billion this time around, and each successive budget has actually increased. We're into our fifth deficit budget over a five-year period.

What the Liberal Party has been saying is that at some point with our budgeting we have to be more realistic and not rely on projections, no matter how detailed they are, from industry. What this province has continued to do is rely on nonrenewable resource revenue, revenue that, once spent, is never returned, instead of having a progressive tax system, that is embraced by all other provinces.

Now, the business of nonrenewable oil and gas counts as a major factor in our budget decisions, but this government's dependency on that sole source of revenue, seconded only by what we get from slots, VLTs, and lotteries, puts the whole sustainability of any kind of future projecting and planning in a very roller coaster circumstance.

The Liberal opposition has said that we need sustainability. We need a long-term commitment, and that's why we've proposed – I won't go through the various parts of the Liberal proposal. We've said that 10 per cent of Albertans are not contributing their fair share and that, in addition, large corporations should be paying an extra 2 per cent for the privilege of making such profits in this province.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview in his book *Follow the Money*, which is still number one on the bestseller nonfiction list, detailed the amount of money that this government fails to collect. At no point in this government's existence – and the Auditor General has pointed it out – has this government, regardless of what the royalty rate was, ever collected that entire amount, and this continues to be a problem.

Now, the hon. Minister of Finance is correct in terms of a number of the oil sands companies finally coming to the point where they have to pay the full royalty. A number of the organizations have been very creative, for example with the Firebag project, when they tried to suggest this was just a continuation of an old project as opposed to a brand new project and, therefore, should not be subject to higher royalty rates. Well, at some point and very soon – historically, it's there – we will be receiving more money from those projects, but we haven't got it yet. So what we do in the meantime is extremely important in our budget planning.

Now, I want to look at a couple of budgets, in particular health. It's not a matter so much of the amount of the money; it's the way that money is directed. In the Liberal caucus we believe we can get a better bang for our buck by addressing more appropriate seniors' care. That's, for example, publicly funded, publicly delivered long-term care as opposed to assisted living, where studies from epidemiologists of the U of A and the U of C have indicated that there is twice the likelihood of individuals in assisted living ending up in acute-care hospital beds, which does

not make sense because the level of care in assisted living is inappropriate. But this budget does not deal with that inappropriate level of funding.

The Premier has not committed, since making the statement in her leadership campaign, that she would not remove the cap on long-term care. Now, as reassuring as it is for the hon. Minister of Seniors to say that he has no such plans or no such, put it in quotations, immediate plans, the Premier not clarifying as to at what point that cap might be lifted provides no assurance for seniors or their families that they're not going to be further gouged in their long-term care settings.

4:00

In terms of looking after seniors: a very small amount, 30 beds, I believe, in Strathmore for long-term care as opposed to numerous beds in assisted living, that does not deliver the depth and quality of care that is required.

Another concern is the very small amount of budget being spent on home care. Home care, keeping a person at home, is about one-tenth or less than the cost of them taking up space in an acute-care bed and then backing up the whole emergency system.

We've talked about the importance of primary care networks, which, contrary to the Minister of Finance's statements, have been embraced not only by Albertans but by front-line physicians and do a very good job of delivering 24-hour care. Now, the Premier came up with this community care clinic, which basically conflicts with the primary care network, and it hasn't been clearly defined how these community care clinics would be different than primary clinics. Primary clinics offer a wide variety of services, not just simply a doctor or a nurse within those facilities.

The fact that we have approximately 60 less beds and an increase in our population of close to a million is very troublesome because this government has continued to talk about providing sufficient long-term care beds to release the pressure on the acute-care bed system.

In education and in health care this government has not bargained in good faith with the front-line service providers, whether they're the doctors, the nurses, the orderlies, or whether they're the teachers, the support staff, the caretakers. This government in its budget imposed a settlement, which – you will see when it comes due at the end of August – will be opposed across this province by teachers who have not yet been forced under the thumb of this government to be called an essential service and, therefore, denied the right to strike. But I'm assuming that that is probably in the works because that's the threat that has been used before.

This budget, again on the theme of education, has not dealt with the \$3 billion plus infrastructure repair backlog in schools, the average age of which is now 50 years. There's nothing in this budget that deals with that infrastructure backlog. The minister has talked about creative financing. He's put out on the eve of an election the idea that we need 400 new schools. Mr. Speaker, the reason we need 400 new schools is because we haven't maintained the old ones. This government has been in power for the last 41 years and has not provided that maintenance in its series of budgets.

Also in education, the unfunded liability, that is controversial depending on which party you belong to, has not been addressed. If it isn't addressed in a progressive manner, that unfunded liability will rise to \$40 billion. The government is very loose with what it considers to be debt and deficit. It doesn't take into account the school infrastructure deficit as a liability. It doesn't take into account the unfunded liability. It talks about potentially putting us further in debt, but good debt, through AIMCo

borrowing to finance these much-needed and touted on the eve of an election 400 new schools that we require.

Now, Mr. Speaker, for a budget to be believable, it also, as I began, has to be sustainable. Clearly, everything in this world from a financial standpoint would have to come together. The government, instead of relying on the information from oil sands companies, would have to do its own calculations of flow rates to get the money that's actually owed to them. That has yet to be achieved, and the Auditor General has pointed out that major failure.

Mr. Speaker, I and the members of my caucus cannot support a budget that is not sustainable, that relies on rosy nonrenewable projections. When we have a glut right now of gas and we have a glut of conventional oil, which lowers our price below that of the world per barrel price or the gas measurement price, instead of doing things in a sustainable fashion, we're getting it out of the ground so fast that we're not getting the best price for it, and we're doing a lot of damage to the environment by doing it.

As for bitumen this government's plan, if the Obama administration can work through it, is to send it down the Keystone in its raw state to be refined, and then we'll buy it back at a much more expensive price. The hon. individuals from the Wildrose have clearly pointed out alternatives such as having it processed east of us in a Canadian circumstance and then supplying our own eastern markets. This is something the Liberals have agreed with; it's something the NDP have agreed on: keeping our jobs here in Canada, keeping our jobs in Alberta.

There is no balance in this budget. It's a wing-and-a-prayer budget. Mr. Speaker, we'll have an opportunity to talk about some of the fallacies of the funding associated with the passing of this Education Act and the cost that may spring into effect with regard to the human rights tribunal. That's a whole other topic which I'll save for the debate on Bill 2.

This is one of the most unrealistic budgets to be produced so far. [interjection] If anything goes wrong whatsoever in the financing, the government has no fallback position, at least not one that has been clarified. If the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has the backup plan, I would be glad to hear it from him or any other astute members who I respect in this Assembly.

Thank you, hon. Speaker, for allowing me to point out just a few of the shortcomings of this rose-coloured-glasses budget.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

The next speaker is Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona. Did I see Calgary-Currie rise, wanting to get on the list as well?

Standing Order 29(2)(a) will be available after this speaker and for subsequent speakers thereafter.

Please proceed.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to rise today to speak about the most important bill here, the appropriation bill, and the billions of dollars that this government is spending for this next year in the province. When it comes to budgets and decisions on budgets, there are not too many people that I know who don't struggle on a monthly basis on how they're going to spend their money and where they're going to spend their money. There are those who are lucky enough that they actually try to put a plan in place where maybe they can go on a holiday, and they save, you know, for a year to get money in place to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I'm concerned with having to continue hearing the rhetoric that has come from the government

side towards the Wildrose, saying: “Oh, we’re going to stop everything. We’re going to cancel schools. We’re going to shut hospitals.” They go on and on. They don’t seem to realize that their budget is more than just health care or just education or the fact that their infrastructure budget – they’ve hit this idea that they need to do it all now.

4:10

I’m most astounded with the Education minister who now says that we need 400 new schools. In the point of privilege earlier today he brought this forward. He made the comments – where did I put that? – that we need to go ahead with these. He said that we used these three communities for his flagship discussion, and that Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and Airdrie need these schools badly. But they put out 40 of these add-ons, and not one of them went to Airdrie this year. Yet he says that these are our flagship areas.

This is exactly, Mr. Speaker, what I’m talking about in prioritizing. If they actually had some integrity and showed the people of Alberta a full list, “Here are our top three,” I would assume with what the Minister of Education said today that his three flagship cities that need it the most are Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, and Airdrie. We’d have that list, and here they would be: one, two, three. How many schools? He said five are needed for Airdrie. He didn’t say how many for Fort McMurray or Grande Prairie. It only makes sense that they would be at the top of the list after what he said. Yet they don’t do it.

This is the problem. This government has failed – and they’ve failed miserably on it – when it comes to prioritizing their spending. We have spoken out against a new federal building upgrade that sat dormant for 20 years. It isn’t a panic that we need to have that now, ahead of schools or ahead of a ring road or ahead of a hospital that needs to be opened or that needs to be manned with people to work.

Yet this government continues to say: “Oh, if we’re going to have any cuts, it’s going to be on schools. It’s going to be, you know, on workers and front-line teachers.” This government is the one, Mr. Speaker, that has prioritized and always politicized these things. They go for where there’s the most – what would I say? – acute pain and fear amongst the people, and say, “If we’re going to cut \$200 million out of our budget, that means it would have to be our schools,” when, in fact, that would be one of the last things that needs to be cut in the budget.

This is the problem with this government in the last four budgets. Even today they’re talking about the need to come up with new, innovative ways of financing. Well, they’ve been pretty innovative in sucking \$16 billion out of our sustainability fund, saying that we need to build these things. How do they say that we’ve been balancing the budget but that now we need to be innovative and start to borrow? What they’re saying is that we’ve spent all of our savings – they’ve been sucked dry – so now we need to be innovative on how we go into debt because we have no more savings to pull out, you know, between \$3 billion to \$5 billion a year. So it’s very concerning, Mr. Speaker, that this government would go and make these fearmongering noises to the public, that: oh, if the Wildrose got in, we wouldn’t have any of these things.

It’s also interesting today. I wanted to stand and do a point of order, and I don’t take them lightly, either. The Premier got up today in question period – and it’s always nice when once in a while she’ll pop up to answer rather than deferring them. It’s very disappointing that she won’t answer them often, and she defers them off to ministers instead. But she got up and said that there are, I believe – I should have gotten the Blues on it – no tax

increases. There are no new taxes. I think she made two statements on that. Well, tax increases. If you’re the one who is having to pay and if your home tax last year was \$2,200 and this year it’s \$2,350, how can you possibly say that there are no more taxes, that there is no increase in taxes? There is.

Seniors on fixed incomes are having a major hit on them because of what this government does. They froze the mill rate – I think it was on page 100 or page 98 – at 2.7 per cent per thousand dollars. Municipal governments: when they go in to balance the books and there is no tax increase, if they have re-evaluated and reassessed the houses and, say, a \$400,000 house is now \$412,000 or \$410,000, they actually readjust the mill rate now. Instead of maybe 2.7 per cent, it’s 2.5 per cent so that it’s balanced out.

Then from that balanced position, they’ll actually say, “You know, we have a shortfall of \$100 million in our budget, so we’re going to have to increase the mill rate 3 per cent,” and then they’re going to grab that money because there’s an increase. The municipal governments have said across this province what their increase is in taxes. It’s going to go up 3 and a half per cent, 6 per cent, depending on which community they come from. Yet this government, who’s supposed to be overseeing, and the minister of urban and municipal affairs, who’s overseeing all of that, have the audacity to tell those individuals that are running balanced budgets or showing an increase in their taxes: “Oh, we’re not increasing the taxes. We’re just increasing what’s coming in.” Then they tried to use this idea that: “Oh, it’s just the new homes that are coming online. Oh, it’s just the growth.” No. That isn’t where it is.

Again, then they’ll refer back to corporate tax and personal tax and say: oh, it’s going up, too. Yes, but if you’re making \$50,000 a year and you get a raise and now you’re making \$55,000 a year, of course personal tax is going to go up, but the income to those individuals also went up. You can’t go back and re-evaluate and say: oh, they’re still getting \$50,000, but we’re going to take another 3 per cent out of these individuals. This is the type of slick talk that comes from this Premier and this Minister of Finance to tell Albertans that, “Oh, no, no, no, there are no increases in taxes; everything is frozen; you don’t need to worry,” when, in fact, they do.

What we’ve been trying to say is that there are some things that you need to do. There is a principled way of going forward. You would think that we had just formed a new province here and that we’re going to have to go out and borrow money to build a new corporation. We’re not a new province. We’re over a hundred years old. We have some incredible buildings like this one. I don’t know what the maintenance is in here, but I’m sure it’s pretty steep. You know, these historic buildings – and this is a beautiful one – aren’t cheap. But you put all of that into the budget, and you know what those costs are, and when you’re doing it properly, there are not a lot of surprises.

You still have a contingency fund for those emergencies. I mean, we have it here in the province. Whether there are forest fires or pine beetles or flooding, there are always unexpected things that come up, and you need to have a contingency plan for that. Even families tell you: save 10 per cent, and have those savings so that if an emergency shows up, you can deal with that.

It’s extremely difficult for those families, though, that are living paycheque to paycheque to do that, yet this government is doing less than paycheque to paycheque. They’ve been sucking out of our sustainability fund for five years. It’s just an oxymoron to say that this is a sustainability fund because what they’ve been pulling it out for isn’t sustainable.

Program growth: my colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere spoke about that yesterday, I believe, that programs, once they’re initiated, are hard to cut back. They go forward. This government

doesn't even look at such things through attrition. It's always growth.

We passed a bill yesterday for a land advocate. That's a new program. It's new expenses. Do we need it? Is it going to be worth while? Those are the questions that we in the Wildrose are asking, Mr. Speaker, and we don't get any answers. We just get the fearmongering that we're going to shut down or not build schools, that we're not going to build ring roads, and there's nothing further from the truth.

What we've put out – and we've shown what we're going to do. The first and most important thing is to cap how much it's going to increase by. What should we cap it by? The rate of inflation plus population growth. This government has failed miserably, going back the last 10 years, I believe, probably 15 years, I think to 2001. Had they capped that growth at inflation plus population, we would have a massive surplus this year plus the last three years, but they failed to do it because they don't cap their spending.

I think I've spoken before that when I was very young and newly married, I went to a finance seminar, and the individual there spoke about the importance of balancing your budget. He said that everybody, even in this audience – I think there were over 400 people there. It was a big room, I would say twice this size, and it was full, with chairs all the way through this auditorium. They were speaking about that. He said: you need to balance your budget. He said that in human nature we have this trait where as soon as we think we're going to get some more money, that we're going to have a raise or income coming in, we'll spend it before we get it.

4:20

He said: "If I could tell you one bit of advice. However you're living today, whatever happens to you, don't change the way you're living for another year." He was referring, of course, to getting a raise or a new job or extra income. He said: "Continue living the way you are for one year before you adapt to that new income you've received. If you inherited something, don't do anything for a year."

That's what you need to do. Have that discipline. When oil royalties have gone up, when personal or corporate tax have gone up, don't immediately run out and say: "Oh, we've got to start a new program. We've got to get this spent." That's the wrong thing to do.

The example that he gave, for those people who are followers of celebrities, was Ivana Trump. She'd just gone through her separation from Donald. He was talking about: everybody has their needs, their way of life. My memory is a little bit foggy on this, but my memory was that she needed \$5,000 a week just to maintain her house. There were flowers. There was hairdressing. He went through this long list of things that she had been doing for years, and she needed that. I think she had a hairdresser come in every morning to do her hair. She had fresh flowers brought in and put out throughout her house. For her, these were all needs.

This is the problem when we get into programs. We start those, and all of a sudden we need those. It's important that you prioritize, and that's what the Wildrose is all about. You prioritize by capping that growth. We had \$800 million that we could prioritize to front-line workers. I believe it was 1,400 nurses. I think it was 1,200 teachers, a thousand seniors' caregivers and attendants. There were 300 more policemen.

That's what the Wildrose would do, prioritize. We would build ring roads, we would build schools, and we would build hospitals first, not museums, not capture CO₂ and stuff it in a black hole in the ground and think it's not going to come back to haunt us. This

government has more programs that have been debunked, starting with Swan Hills, the magnesium plant in High River, the ethanol production, CO₂. There's a long list, Mr. Speaker, of just bogus ideas where someone over there in the government thought: "Oh, isn't this going to be wonderful? Let's prioritize our spending."

Again, for the federal building and to go ahead right now with other things, whether it's museums or sports or recreation facilities, we need the basic fundamentals, all the things that we can and that we should do. We need our education. We need hospitals. We need to have the infrastructure that is critical, the ring roads for the congestion that we're dealing with. We need to balance a budget. We need to be fiscally responsible. We could be if that was our desire. It's not the desire.

The announcements that they've made in the last three weeks aren't as bad as the last election, but it's wrong. Laws should be passed so that they can't make pre-election promises in spending. They're doing it, and this is more debt that isn't paid for. Just like with her promise on the \$107 million, that we'll take it out of in-year savings, she failed to do that. This Premier and this cabinet and this government don't have any desire to balance the budget. They think it's their own money to spend on other people, to buy votes. It's wrong.

The Wildrose would give the people of Alberta a much better budget, that shows a bright future that we could all work toward and enjoy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Section 29(2)(a) is available should anyone wish to question or comment on the previous speech. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore talked about building more hospitals. I want to ask him: will they be private hospitals or publicly funded, publicly delivered hospitals?

Mr. Hinman: Well, you know, it's always interesting when we get those questions. Of course, there's always the ideology.

I don't know at this point we need more hospitals. We need the hospitals that we have opened, and we need the workers to fill them. What the Wildrose is absolutely committed to here in the province is that we have a publicly funded health care system, but we are not concerned about whether that's a public or a private facility.

When I go to my family doctor, it's in a private facility, yet it's publicly funded. I don't pull my wallet out to go see my doctor at his private office. Many people seem to cross those lines over, thinking: oh, my goodness, if it's privately run, we're in trouble. The Wildrose and the people of Alberta that we've heard from are all about wanting a publicly run health care system.

What they want in there is choice. What they want in there is some competition, not just the government appointing and saying: oh, you will get to do all of this in the province. We end up paying a premium price for often a poor product. But if there's more than one facility and we were to actually say, "You know, we're going to pay \$12,000 for hips" and then another facility says, "Oh, we can come in and give an RFP, a request for proposal, to do that" – that is what we had going in Calgary.

What happened there was shameful in that we had a provider that was the best in the world. People were coming to see. The incidence of infection and postoperative incidents were the lowest; their time getting out of there was fantastic. This was a world-leading facility. This government, with its ideology, said, "Oh, we're going to shut that place down, and we're going to push it over into the hospital there." That was wrong, in our opinion.

We have many, many experts here in the province that would love to provide better service, but the province and the superboard say: no, we're not going to allow that. I remember that in the by-election the superboard had just made the decision that we didn't need the GreenLight laser down at the Rockyview and that they were going to pull that out. Why? Because they'd said that they didn't need it. This is the type of thing that we're talking about, with the government making central decisions and saying: oh, this is what this area needs; this is what this one needs. The administration and the doctors in the Rockyview very much said, "No, we need this here; we should have it here," and they started to look elsewhere to see: how do we fund it to get it?

Lethbridge. We can go back to the incidents there, the first area in the province to say: "You know what? We can't send all of our people to Calgary to get an MRI done. There's a six-month to a one-year wait. We need one here in Lethbridge." They had to raise the money to get it. You can go out to Taber, again with doctors there raising money for equipment that central decision-makers say you cannot have.

This fallacy or this fear that a private facility can't provide public service isn't the case. We're all excited about having the best: the best price, the best quality, the best time available for people to get in and get treated quickly and not have to wait for six months or nine months because this government has set up a system that causes a backlog that is unacceptable and causes pain for those people who can't get in there.

I do remember meeting a schoolteacher who had to quit working for six months because they hadn't replaced her knee and she could no longer stand on it. The pain was too much. Those are the types of stories. I've heard about knees. I've heard about shoulders. I've heard about hips. I've gone door-knocking and run into these people, and they've all waited too long. Why? Because we've created this monopoly and this centrally driven government that has said: the way we control the price is that we control the flow. It hasn't worked.

We need that option there, where private facilities can look at it and say: "You know what? We can provide it better." They'd put that bid in to the provincial government, to Alberta Health Services, and we'd set up a system where it doesn't matter whether it's a private or a public facility. What matters is that they're accredited, that they're good, and that they provide a great service for the people of Alberta so that we're not waiting so long and don't have such a hefty health care bill.

We pay more per capita here in Alberta, I believe, than any other province, and we need to do better. We can do better, and we'll focus that on front-line service.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The time has expired for 29(2)(a), so we'll move on to the next speaker, which is Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, members, for listening intently to my comments. For fear of being redundant, I'd just like to include that I have made comments earlier in this House relative to the budget, and at one point I reviewed the budget. But after reviewing it, I have come to the conclusion that I certainly cannot support this budget.

In doing so, I speak not only as an MLA but as a father of a four-year-old. I believe that all of us in Alberta have to run our homes, our households. We cannot be spending more than we take in. The fact that this budget is in fact going to be running for the fourth or fifth year in a row a deficit: I think that is not the way Albertans run their households. Therefore, in speaking with

Albertans and my constituents in the good communities of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, the constituency, the message I've received from them is that I cannot support this budget.

4:30

I would just like to take a few moments, Mr. Speaker, to draw to your attention what my concern is. As you know, Alberta is spending per capita more than any other province in Canada. Clearly, in the idea of spending money, one assumes that: oh, well, we must be getting the best value. What I am most concerned with is the fact that for the amount of money that is being spent in Alberta, we are not getting the best value. I think each of us in our household as a consumer goes and shops and always looks for the best value. We look over here; we look over there. We look at the product and the quality before we make a decision. So one of the reasons I cannot support this budget is that I do not accept the value that we're getting for what is being spent.

Even more so I cannot accept the priority of this government. The Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance at one point indicated in numerous discussions on this budget that – the Minister of Finance, who is responsible for this budget and who delivered his address to the Assembly, provided a question to me saying: well, how many schools do you think we could have built if we hadn't done the \$350 million federal building? At the time the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance were indicating: how many schools could we have built?

Well, the average cost of a school is between \$20 million to \$30 million to \$40 million, depending upon the number of students that we have in growing communities such as Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. In my judgment, one of the things I would have liked to have seen happen is this: that more schools would have been built by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Education in Fort McMurray rather than wasting hard-earned tax dollars on a \$350 million restoration of the federal building. Not to say that it's not important, but this is not the right time to be doing it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we welcome the federal building restoration but at an appropriate time. In light of the deficits that are being run and the fact that \$350 million of Albertans' hard-earned tax dollars is being wasted on this building, I can say without any fear of contradiction that the offices that MLAs have in the Leg. Annex are quite satisfactory. It's no different than in your home. In your home you can't always go ahead and do the renovation that you want. Not everyone gets to get the granite or whatever. I don't have granite in my home on the countertops in the kitchen. Maybe people do, and good for them, but that's a choice that they make. My point is, though, that this government's priority to spend \$350 million could have potentially built 15 to 20 more schools.

I'll conclude with one other comment. It is a comment to the Minister of Finance, who at one point was the minister of health. Not only do I talk about building more schools; I also talk to the Minister of Transportation about twinning highway 63. The fact is that there has been no twinning over the last four years and that they've only twinned 16 kilometres of highway, when in actual fact we are the economic engine feeding Alberta with billions of dollars in revenue, but we are not getting our fair share back.

Mr. Speaker, what I would like to conclude with is this. To the Minister of Finance: how dare he provide a budget where he has ignored the senior citizens that built this province. The Minister of Finance, who was once the minister of health, discontinued a long-term care centre in Fort McMurray before the last election. As of this point in time, over four years later, where they've had now five announcements, they have still not even broken ground.

How dare a Minister of Finance be willing to spend \$350 million on MLA offices with over a hundred thousand people, our seniors, and almost 65 of them at our Northern Lights hospital in acute-care beds, which are really like jail cells, and we are still waiting for our first long-term care facility. I think it's shameful, and just on that principle alone I believe it says that this government has got its priorities wrong.

So no twinning. I haven't seen it in four years in terms of what's going on in the budget. The Minister of Transportation in estimates the other night indicated they're not going to plan on doing any twinning till 2013. I might say for the record that the Minister of Transportation said: oh, well, the mayor was happy in Fort McMurray. I talked to the mayor. In speaking to her, she is quite clearly not happy. What the Minister of Transportation said in budget estimates was not accurate. I took the time to speak directly to the mayor on that point, and she assured me that she is not happy with what is taking place and the lack of work that is going on with highway 63.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance, the former wrecking ball of the ministry of health, who said no to the seniors, who built this province, about a long-term care facility – now we are four years later, and still we have not seen a shovel go into the ground for our seniors, who built this province. Some of our seniors have passed away in acute-care beds, and that is shameful in terms of what they have contributed to building our province.

I will not as the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo be supporting this budget and the lack of leadership by this Minister of Finance. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Section 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member: I wonder if he could elaborate on the question of providing seniors' care. We know that the government is proposing to have various forms of seniors' care built by the private sector, and in light of your colleagues' previous comments with respect to that matter, I would like you to elaborate a little bit on what sort of position you have relative to whether or not this seniors' care could be delivered in the government model with the private developers and how you feel that would be accomplished, what some of the economics are.

We know that the Premier hotly denied today the assertion that they had announced an intention to lift the cap on long-term care. Quite frankly, I think that those statements were absolutely false. During her campaign for the leadership of the PC Party she talked about lifting the cap on the seniors' care, and most recently her Seniors minister talked about having a discussion after the election about lifting the cap. There's no question in my mind that the price of having private developers being involved in construction of seniors' care is, in fact, the requirement for them to make a profit, and that's natural. That's what they want to do. But in order to accomplish that, lifting the cap will allow them to charge much higher fees to seniors and their families.

If you have a better way of delivering private health care than the government, I would sure be all ears, hon. member.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member to respond.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you very much. A very good question, and I'm glad the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has asked that question because I was fighting over two and a half years ago for seniors as they were in acute-care beds in Fort McMurray's Northern Lights hospital, if you can imagine, the

only city in all of Alberta that does not have a continuing care long-term care facility after this very government had committed to one in the 2008 election. Here we are – and you may ask me today – but still to this point in time they have not even broken ground. What they have done is that they've had five or six press announcements. I think they should stop killing trees because, really, the press announcement is not worth the paper it is actually written on.

Getting back to the idea of this Premier and her broken promise, where she talked about lifting the caps, that is very concerning to me. Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that in speaking to my seniors in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, they also are equally concerned because lifting a cap means that our seniors, the very seniors who have built this province – and I believe an important value that I stand by today, my job, is to represent them. My job is to bring their voice to this Legislature. I did that, and what did this tired and old government do after 41 years?

Mr. Mason: They kicked you out unceremoniously.

Mr. Boutilier: They kicked me out. Why did they kick me out? They kicked me out without going to their caucus because that's how arrogant they were at the time. But they're not quite as arrogant today – okay? – apparently because they've been listening to Albertans and what has been going on in Alberta. Clearly, Albertans are not pleased with their performance.

I am named after a senior citizen, my grandfather, who lived a very good life. I'm very proud of him and proud to stand here today because of the fact that we treat seniors with respect. I told this PC Premier and caucus that I could not look a senior citizen in the eye, someone who at the time was 101 years old, when the minister of health at the time basically said that she's going to have to wait four or five years. Four or five more years, and at the time she was 101 years old, in an acute-care bed.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, let me conclude on that very good question that I thank the member for. I do not support what the Premier of Alberta has said about lifting the cap because it means the vulnerable, our seniors, who built this province, could be jeopardized once again. You know who can deliver the best care for our seniors? Clearly, it is their families, and I thank every Alberta family who has been supporting their loved ones. But when it comes to a point in time when they are in their home and they have to be moved to a long-term care facility, we need to provide them with the absolute necessary care so that we show them and demonstrate to them the respect that they deserve, that this government has not shown them.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* on Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2012.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me to speak on the Appropriation Act. I'm going to try to give my comments in a global sense, as it sort of directs where we've been as a province over the course of the last 25 years, and what I will try to see is what we should try to do over the next 25 years. I'll use this moment of discussing budgets and our adding to budgets at this time and use this time to try and outline a bit of a plan for where we have been and where we should be going.

If you look at the Alberta situation as it's been since approximately 1987, we have brought in some \$225 billion in petroleum resource revenue. This is a largesse that almost any

jurisdiction in North America and, I would hazard to guess, any jurisdiction in the world would have found to be a bounty of great abundance, which, by all accounts, it has been. But it's important to note what we've done with that unbelievable bounty. It's true that we've put up some hospitals, we've built some roads, we've built some schools and some other things, which, I guess, can be called legitimate government expenses. That is fine, but at the end of the day we have to look at whether this revenue source, which we have used to pay the day's bills, should be used to do that going forward.

I think, actually, that this downturn in the economy, this recession, this almost – I don't like to even use the word "recession." This is not really a recession; it's almost a fundamental breakdown of the market system by the way banks and finance companies and the like have set things up. It has caused us here in 2012 or may cause us to have a much better understanding of what Alberta may be like without oil and gas than we did in 2008. I don't think anyone in 2008 could have foreseen where the Alberta economy, the world economy was going to be over the course of these last four years. I think this lesson in time, if we do take it as a lesson in time, points us to what Alberta could be like without oil and gas revenues.

Like I say, over that 25-year-period from 1987 to 2012 we have spent every last dime of fossil fuel resources that has come in. Largely, we have very little left, if anything. You know, the sustainability fund is virtually drained. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity pointed out, if you really add up the ledger on deficits for school infrastructure, on teachers' pension liabilities and the like, in my view this province would be considered in debt in cash due and owing. That's despite this largesse of one-time fossil fuel resources that we've enjoyed. I think we have to do a better job of planning for the long run here in this province. But, you know, as John Maynard Keynes said, "In the long run, we are all dead," so it's difficult to do that. I recognize that the pressures of the day dictate that sometimes that's difficult, but I think that given what we know and where we've been these last four years, we can do that.

I might introduce something here that may actually be a conservative principle going forward. I don't find it conservative at all, what we've been doing to this point in time, which has been to spend every last drop of fossil fuel resource that's coming to the public purse on paying today's bills. I don't think that it's conservative to have lowered taxes to such an extent that we used fossil fuel resources to lower taxes. Okay? I don't think that's conservative at all. I think that that's almost taking advantage of the fact that we live on 25 per cent of the world's oil resources and saying that it's our God-given right to blow it all on one generation. I don't believe that's conservative.

I think our future budgeting should look more like: what we use today, society should in fact pay for. Okay? Let's have that discussion with the electorate. What we use today as a society we should in fact pay for. With that principle you get a budget, and you factor that out. With this budget I think we're spending \$11 billion in nonrenewable resources paying today's bills. You'd say to society: "Well, we bring in \$30 billion worth of revenue. In order for you to pay for the services that you use, we're going to cut \$11 billion from those services." I'm, by all means, not advocating for that, but that would be a legitimate starting place, to say: where do we cut? Then you legitimately ask people: "Do you want to cut teachers? Do you want to cut nurses? Do you want to cut hospital staff? Do you not want us to build roads? Do you not want us to do all this stuff?" Then they have to ask themselves whether they truly want to pay for the services; i.e., taxation. That's what it is.

We have to understand here that sometimes governments are involved to deliver services to society in a more efficient manner than individuals can do for themselves. It's a trite example, but imagine, Mr. Speaker, if we all went out and built our own roads. Can you imagine us all building a road to the Legislature, all building a road to our school? This isn't a very decent way for society to organize itself. So there are certain things that government can do. I would say that in the main those are public health care and public education. In my view, clearly those are appropriate expenditures for government to be involved in to help with the organization of society or the creation at least of equality of opportunity, a place where rich and poor can develop their lives, strive to build their lives in the manner they see fit.

Back to my point on this budget, have that conversation with Albertans about what, actually, government services provide and have them legitimately pay for them. Or if you wanted, then say: "You want to do it yourself? Let's cut from that position that doesn't cut into the fossil fuel resources side of things, or let's add to that position without spending the fossil fuel resources." Okay? That would be a legitimate, open, honest debate of whether you're in favour of cutting services, like someone on the alleged right-wing side of the spectrum would want, or adding to services, like someone on the alleged left-wing side of services would want.

4:50

What we've done here is simply thrown these fossil fuel resources into the mix and considered that it's ours to blow. We've tried to trumpet around that we are being fiscally conservative by keeping taxes low, but we're not. We're just being fiscally irresponsible, which is more to the point. We're being fiscally irresponsible to future generations, to Alberta's future, and to really doing pragmatically what would be correct and fair to the people of Alberta both now and into our future. So if we're going to have that debate with people, let's not confuse it with our fossil fuel resources. Then you can have a legitimate debate about what role government has in your society and what it doesn't.

What this government does is try to claim to be conservative by keeping taxes low while all the while blasting through fossil fuel resources. Really, it's taking the cop-out position, and that, in my view, has to stop. If you want to have this discussion with people, have it in an open and transparent fashion.

Let's point to the example of Norway. Okay? Norway, as you well know, has a fund set up of \$600 billion, maybe even \$700 billion. What they have done, then, is considered fossil fuel resources one of those things we set aside, and we discuss with the citizenry what we're going to pay for today and what we're not going to pay for today. This money is set aside because it's not our right to blow it in one generation. That, to me, is a legitimate position.

I believe in all objectivity that if someone from around the world or if someone from Mars, let's say, came down and looked at the way Norway did it over the last 25 years and the way Alberta did it and objectively looked as to who did it right, there's only one answer they can come to. There's only one sane answer you can come to. It was Norway. Okay? So let's try and get to that legitimate debate with people about what we use, what the role of government is, and let's have that starting point with our people, not fudge it by blasting through oil and gas revenues. That's why I was encouraged to hear in the throne speech that we will be looking at all revenue sources.

Now, I realize it's election time, and we have to take positions. If this government is back – and by all accounts that might be a difficult thing to say; right now it's not clear whether they will be

back – I hope that is a position they honestly take. I believe honestly that Albertans will appreciate the fact that we're giving some view to the long run, our future prosperity.

Guess what? Say if we even draw a dot. I always go back to this. People say people are moving here for the low taxes. Well, I'll tell you what. Out of about the last 60 people I've asked why they moved here, they moved here for a job. Actually, in fact, the next person I meet who says they've moved here for the low taxes will be the first person. Okay? I simply don't run into them.

We must remember that, you know, oftentimes it's accidents of geography; i.e., us living in the Pembina basin, which has a lot of geological basis that allows us to have this oil and gas wealth, is the reason for our prosperity. I know the old joke is: well, the Tories put the oil in the ground. But I've been here almost 42 years, and my dad's been here 69 years, and he rightfully tells me that it was the Social Credit who put it in the ground anyway. So let's give credit where credit is due, if we're really trying to be cute with it. Let's remember that our economy runs principally on accidents of geography.

If we could consider some of the things I've said in here, maybe it holds some validity on how we should do future budgeting and how we should really talk about the future best interests of this province. Maybe I've said something of relevance, or maybe I haven't, but I've tried.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to other people's thoughts on the matter.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Section 29(2)(a) is available for five minutes of questioning or commenting. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Possibly, Mr. Speaker, I already know the answer for what I'm about to ask. It may be a rhetorical question, but if you could comment briefly on the importance of both a public education system and a public health care system that is public, not only publicly funded but publicly delivered, publicly administered, how that is important in the budgeting process to make sure that we have the most appropriate funding for both public education and public health care.

Mr. Hehr: Clearly, I hope you'd start with the principles outlined before. We bring in \$30 billion in federal transfers, some revenues from user fees, another \$12 billion from personal and corporate taxation. Hopefully, you would build a budget with what the government of the day does to provide public health care and publicly delivered health care, because I believe in the main that that is the most reasonable approach given our geography, our history, and actually getting results from the health care system as well as simply funding a public education system.

If I could comment on the role of government in public education, I believe their only role under the Constitution is to provide funding for public schools, our separate schools. Our francophone schools outside of that constitutional responsibility the government has made an accommodation for.

In fact, I believe a splinter society doesn't add value to it and doesn't move your society forward in an egalitarian way that recognizes equality of opportunity. That's what the education system is there for, to recognize equality of opportunity. Your education should not be based upon the wealth of your parents or, actually, frankly, the religion of your parents. If you want that you can pay for it yourself.

In the main, in returning those two things to a budget, whether it was a Liberal government, a Conservative government, a New Democrat government or a Wildrose government, I hope they

would go back to that base principle of trying to at least give out what our oil and gas resources are, and say: no, these we don't touch.

We're able to in Alberta have corporations that because of our accidents of geography, i.e. living on 25 per cent of the world's oil resources, are able to make large profits. Accordingly, they should be asked to pay for some of those things that we do today. Their employees use it, the owners use it, all of that stuff. We should have corporations pay a little more, and I think in the Liberal platform we struck a reasonable start on that, like 2 per cent more.

I also think it's insane that we've adopted a flat-tax system here in Alberta, a system that sees a person making a million dollars a year pay the same rate of tax as the person making \$30,000 a year. [interjection] Still, if we look at it, we're the only jurisdiction in North America that has this type of taxation system. You know, being the only person doing it is not always a good thing. You might have to question why governments haven't followed this lead if it's been such a panacea, if it's been such a real value for us. It hasn't been a real value for us. It's allowed us to snow through all of this resource revenue at once.

I heard an hon. member say: well, they paid more tax. But I'm looking at society in general. Has it been that you want to go to this taxation principle to then snow through all these fossil fuel resources? Well, that is a government choice, but I don't believe it serves society well in either the short term or the long term. In the short term, because you can never tell what your resource revenue is going to be from year to year, it doesn't allow for predictable and sustainable funding. In the long term it doesn't allow us to save and protect future generations. He's just putting off the day when the oil and gas is gone, and then those people will be forced to pay a 50 per cent tax rate if they want to keep up the services we have today.

5:00

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

The chair is pleased to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2012.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2012, which is predominately a bill about this coming budget. It appropriates the funds to meet the budget estimates for the 2012-13 year.

Mr. Speaker, today in question period I posed a number of questions to the Premier relating to her habit or tactic of postponing difficult decisions until after the election to create reviews that are supposedly independent, which may or may not have fixed terms of reference and times that they're going to be coming back to us, in order to dispose of difficult questions that might cause the Progressive Conservative Party some trouble in the election. And I said during that debate that this has become such a common tactic employed by the Premier that it's almost a cliché: of course, that's what she's going to do.

She stood up and said, "Well, you know, I can't interfere with the process that we have here," as if the process was something set by someone other than her and set for some purpose other than to create some distance from a difficult issue and sufficient delay to get it past the election. We've seen this with the so-called public inquiry into health care, which is not on any of the matters that were promised. There's a review on electricity prices. There's a review on MLA compensation. There's a review on whether or not the cap for long-term care fees is going to be lifted. The list goes on and on.

Mr. Speaker, I was trying to characterize this budget, and it occurred to me as I was thinking about it that this budget does exactly what the Premier has been doing with every other difficult issue. At first, it was a surprising sort of budget to be tabled by a Conservative government because there was a little more spending on things like education and health care, some of the things that the Conservatives traditionally cut between elections.

We knew it was going to be an election budget – we knew that – but if you really examine it, Mr. Speaker, you'll find that this increase in funding, which is intended to be popular as the Conservative Party goes to face the people, is a bit of a sleight of hand, that, in fact, what they've done here is not sustainable and it is not realistic. The chickens will come home to roost, but the government has carefully arranged things so that they will come home to roost, they hope, after they are safely re-elected.

The assumptions in this budget are, quite simply, so optimistic that you might consider that it is just a hope and a prayer. The fiscal plan, for example, forecasts nominal GDP growth at 7.7 per cent next year, Mr. Speaker. That's a phenomenal rate of growth. They're predicting that personal income tax revenue is going to increase by 9.3 per cent, but at the same time they're only predicting that the population will grow by 2 per cent in the same period of time. They are expecting corporate income tax to go up by 11 and a half per cent, so an additional \$500 million and an additional \$800 million for personal income tax.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it goes beyond optimistic. It really looks to me that they have put deliberately overly optimistic figures in terms of the economic growth that they're predicting in this province. Now, that might happen. You know, I've heard the government ads that are being run at taxpayers' expense: the boom is back and good times are returning to the province. They really are something that the Progressive Conservative Party should be paying for, but we're all paying for the government's very upbeat message as they head towards an election. I would suggest that they are misusing taxpayers' funds.

They are trying to create the impression that all of the spending that's included in this budget is going to be sustainable or achievable, and I think that that is really stretching it. It's possible, but the chances of significantly less growth are there as well. So they're gambling. Of course, if they lose, then we all lose. But they plan to be safely re-elected by that point, Mr. Speaker, and then have another three years or so to figure out what to do to dig the province out of the hole that they've put us in.

Now, one of the things that I think is important is that this government is continuing to provide significant expenditures for program expenditures. There's no question about it, Mr. Speaker. Whether it's spent wisely or not is another question, but we all know that Alberta spends more, for example, on health care per capita than any other province. They're doing that at the same time as they're continuing along with the tax cuts for the wealthy and the corporations that they promised and delivered on years ago. This government has in the last 10 years cut corporate taxes from 16 per cent to about 10 per cent. That's about a one-third or slightly more than one-third cut in corporate taxes that's taken place in that time. Also, they imposed a flat tax on personal income, which provides a very, very handsome tax reduction for the very wealthiest amongst us.

That's their priority, and those are the things that they've really done. There's no indication that they're going to change that, nor is there any indication that they're going to change the fact that we have some of the lowest royalties in the entire world on our natural resources, particularly on our oil. They did this, Mr. Speaker, at a time when gas prices were very high and the government was getting enormous amounts of revenue from

natural gas royalties. Now, as we all know, the shale gas finds in B.C. and in the United States and so on have depressed gas prices, and they're going to stay depressed for the foreseeable future, so the revenue has dropped.

That brings us to why we're running a deficit in the province. It's not because the government is overspending on social programs, but it is because it has become too dependent on nonrenewable resource revenue to fund programs. Right now, Mr. Speaker, about 30 per cent of our program spending is funded by nonrenewable resource revenue, and that became necessary because of the tax cuts that the government has created.

When you look at the budget, Mr. Speaker, there are many aspects of it that I think are seriously deficient. But the main point that I want to make is that they have basically brought forward a budget that is not realistic, that overestimates the revenue, that paints a really rosy picture, that's designed to get them re-elected, and we will all pay the piper sometime down the road. They're doing that, I think, in a very deliberate and very cynical way. I think that's the main point.

5:10

There are a number of problems with how the government is approaching different questions. Of course, long-term care is one of them. We have a serious shortage of long-term care. The government tries not to even talk about long-term care. They talk about continuing care and they talk about assisted living and so on and that they are planning to have this delivered by the private sector. So the private sector has told the government, you know, that: "If you want us to invest our capital in your assisted living facilities, we're going to have to make some money from it. We're going to have to make a profit. That's the business we're in." That is, in fact, a requirement if you're going to go to the private sector for anything.

So they've said that one of the things you're going to have to do is take the cap off of long-term care fees. The Premier said today that allegations that the government was planning to do that were completely false, that my question was full of things that just simply weren't true. But actually, Mr. Speaker, if you go back to her campaign promises, when she sought the leadership, she talked about removing the cap on long-term care. Her own minister of health talked just the other day about having a discussion with Albertans after the election.

Ms Notley: Her Minister of Seniors.

Mr. Mason: I'm sorry. The Minister of Seniors said that.

There's no question in my mind that the government is intending to do this, but they are simply going to defer the decision until after the election. I don't know if anyone else sees a pattern here, Mr. Speaker, but I certainly do see a pattern.

The Conservatives are running as if they were Liberals or New Democrats in this election. But when you really scratch the shiny new paint job, Mr. Speaker, you see the same old Tory blue underneath because this budget, if you analyze it, leads back to the same old Tory policies once the election is over. We're going to see more costs loaded onto people, onto families for health care, for seniors' care, for electricity.

The Premier has claimed that they've stabilized electricity prices. In fact, there are ads that I've seen on the Internet and other places saying that the government has brought in a program to stabilize electricity prices. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. What they've done is that they've frozen some of the intermediary fees, the ancillary fees, that are the most stable part of our power price, and they've stabilized them at the highest

price they've been in 10 years. They've done a big favour to those companies because they've frozen those fees at a very, very high level. So those companies are guaranteed lots of revenue from those fees. What they haven't done is done anything about the cost of actual electricity, which remains extremely volatile, which remains very high, unstable. They've done nothing. The government's claim and its use of taxpayers' money to claim that they've stabilized electricity prices is absolutely false.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other issues related to this budget, but because this bill is about appropriation, I've tried to focus primarily on the revenue side and the overly optimistic estimates that the government has provided in order to justify a budget that not only combines tax reductions or very low taxes for the very wealthiest and their friends in the corporate sector, who fund their election campaigns, but at the same time provides some increases to program spending.

It's not an honest budget, Mr. Speaker. It is a sleight of hand. It is, in fact, the very, very embodiment of this Premier's philosophy, which is to stall for time, to put off difficult decisions until after the government is safely re-elected. It is my sincere hope that the people of Alberta will see through this budget, will see through the Progressive Conservative Party and throw this government out, as it should, when the election is called within a few days.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, section 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll repeat the question that I put to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Your opinion with regard to the budgeting for publicly funded, publicly administered, publicly delivered health care and education: do you feel this budget addresses those concerns or that it's tending toward privatization or other methods of delivery of services at public expense?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member to respond.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will just note that it's the New Democratic Party that has been over the long run the most consistent supporter of publicly funded and publicly delivered education and health care, and we're very proud of that. We haven't wavered. We don't say one thing in one election and something else in another. I think you could probably also say that, although they're a young party, of the Wildrose, that they are fairly consistent in wanting more private health care. The government also wants more private health care, but they don't say so at election time. They do it afterwards, and, you know, I've had enough experience to realize that that's the case. In the 2004 election I challenged Ralph Klein in the leaders' debate that he had a secret plan for privatizing health care, which he hotly denied. A few months later we had the third way, which was two-tiered private health care.

The same thing happened when the last Premier was in the debate in the campaign in 2008. He had said absolutely nothing about the government's plans for changing health care, but as soon as he was re-elected, he appointed the health minister of the day, who was, as we've said, a one-man wrecking crew in the health system. He closed beds, and he shut down hospitals, and he laid off nurses. He created a corporate model of health care to be delivered here, which the government has still not gotten rid of.

There's lots of evidence that this government deliberately hides its plans for private health care before elections and then implements them after. I believe they're doing it again because, of

course, we do have that caucus document, that was presented to the PC caucus by the current minister of health, that talked about more private delivery, more private insurance, doctors operating in both the public and the private systems at the same time. That's where they're going again, Mr. Speaker. At least the Wildrose is honest about their plans, and I think that that really speaks volumes. There is no question in my mind that this budget doesn't meet fundamental tests in terms of protecting public health care, and by that I mean publicly delivered health care, not just publicly funded, and education.

Just on that point, I wanted to just, you know, talk a little bit about what this government does and what it means when they say: public health care. They clarify, if pressed, that they mean publicly funded health care, that they're committed to publicly funded health care, but what that means is that they want to use taxpayers' money to subsidize the private profits of their corporate friends as they deliver, whether it's a drug company or an insurance company or private health care, a private hospital or a private clinic. That's what they mean. Sure, it's publicly funded, but what it actually is is taxpayers' money supporting private profit in health care. All of the evidence shows clearly that publicly delivered health care provides the best outcomes at the lowest price, so if you want to control costs for the taxpayer, a publicly funded and publicly delivered system is far and away the best option. That's something we've been consistent about, Mr. Speaker. It's not just this election.

The same for education. The government likes to talk about choice in education. They like to talk about private schools, home-schooling, and so on, but we're committed to strengthening the public school system and making it stronger.

Thank you.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the Government House Leader wishes to speak. We'll try to maintain a reasonable rotation list here. For some answers to some of the questions posed, I will recognize the Government House Leader, and then we'll go to Calgary-Currie and wrap up with Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been sitting here patiently listening all afternoon to some of the comments on the Appropriation Act. I have to say that I live in an almost entirely different world than the other speakers. I live in an optimistic world. I live in a place where people care about their province and the future of their children and their grandchildren. Investing in people was a priority for the constituents in Edmonton-Whitemud, recognizing that there are two ways to build our province for the future. One is investing in infrastructure, which this government has consistently done, and the other is investing in people so that they have the knowledge, skills, and ability to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that exist here in this province.

That's what Budget 2012 was about: investing in people and ensuring that we have the kind of society, the kind of place where Albertans can live in dignity, where if they have issues or barriers to success, problems to overcome, as a society we come together to help, not to do it for them, not to take away their independence but to help where help is needed, so that every Albertan has access to those opportunities. That's what Budget 2012 speaks to.

Budget 2012 speaks to that sense of the place that we're in now, which is the envy of virtually every place in the world at the moment, certainly of every place in North America in terms of the economic opportunity and the quality of life: the ability to live in a community that has clean air, clean water, a big blue sky; the

things that are rich about our community, the ability to go for a walk in the river valley in Edmonton or to go to the new Art Gallery of Alberta or to go to a football game or a hockey game, if that's your idea of culture, or to go to a symphony.

I had the privilege, Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago of heading a process to develop a 20-year strategic plan, and we talked about unleashing innovation and leading and learning so that we could compete in a global marketplace and ensure that Alberta was the best place to live, work, and raise our families. In fact, that's what we're achieving. We're well on track for that 20-year strategic plan, understanding that oil and gas and carbon resources are fundamental to our economy today with agriculture, forestry, which is a carbon resource as well, and people and tourism.

When I hear people talking about Budget 2012 the way that we've heard this afternoon, I'm thinking that that doesn't describe the people I've talked with in Edmonton-Whitemud or across Edmonton or across the province, for that matter. That doesn't relate to their sense of hope and optimism in the province for themselves, for their children, for their families.

I heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood talking about projections and not being realistic in the projections. The hon. member should know and understand, because it's been discussed before – or he could read it in the estimates and the business plan – that the way we project revenue now is the same as we projected revenue before. Nobody is making up new numbers. You basically look at: what's the price of oil going to be? Nobody actually knows what the price of oil is going to be. You look at the best prognosticators in the world, you take all of their advice, you take an average of what they're talking about, you look at some private prognosticators because we have access to good information as well from private companies, and then you take something that's slightly lower than their average in order to be more conservative about the prognostication, the same process as has been used in the past.

When you take a look at the volumes, you don't make up the volumes. You go and ask the people who are in production how much they're going to produce, and you base your projection of revenue based on price and volume. Both of those are numbers that are not made up; they're numbers that come.

When people talk about optimistic projections, indeed they are optimistic. They're optimistic because the prognosticators around the world, the best people in the field, are very optimistic about where the price of oil is going to be. They're not that optimistic about where the price of gas is going to be, but at least they're putting out their figures as to what they believe it'll be. We know with some degree of certainty, barring a disaster, what the volumes are going to be.

So the projections are not made up. The projections are a process that's used every year to determine what revenues we might be able to achieve from royalties based on those numbers.

In terms of balancing the budget, again, I've spoken to many, many people in my constituency and in Edmonton and, indeed, across the province about what their priority is. Do they want to balance the budget this year at all costs? Well, the answer has been a resounding no. They don't want government to cut back on health, they don't want government to reduce the funding to education, and they certainly don't want to decrease the investment in people services, in human services. In fact, there's been a lot of sentiment expressed, a lot of very, very good comments from across the province, about the increase, for example, of \$400 to AISH recipients, a promise that was made by the Premier and a promise that we kept in this budget, a very important statement about people living in dignity.

Albertans are not cruel people; they're not inhumane people. They don't want to balance the budget at all costs. They want to know that there is a plan and a process by which we will be able to live within our means. They want to know that we're using the contingency fund appropriately, that we know where we're going, and that we are being very prudent with the resources so that we get value for money. Indeed, I've talked, again, with a number of people who think that Bill 1, the value review process for budgeting, is a very important process because what it says is that we want to have certain programs to ensure that Albertans are helped when they need help, that we want to have education and health care, but we want to know that the money that's being spent is being spent prudently and achieving the results. So the Results-based Budgeting Act is a very important piece of legislation to highlight that that's exactly where we're going.

The projections are not outlandish. They're not off base. They're done in a prudent manner. They may be wrong – and, heaven knows, they've been wrong before – but that's because they have to be based on numbers that nobody can actually ascertain until they look in their rear-view mirror, and we will do that eventually. But for now we're projecting the revenues in exactly the same way as we've projected revenues before, and it's an appropriate way to do it.

We're planning for programming for Albertans in a manner which allows us to look at each program and say, "Are we getting value for money, and are we achieving the results that Albertans want?" We'll continue to do that.

Then we come to the capital budget. Some of our friends here think that the way to balance a budget is to not spend so much money on capital. Of course, at the same time they say: but spend the money in capital in my riding because my kids are more important than your kids. That's just untenable, Mr. Speaker.

We have a province that has had significant growth spurts. One of the growth spurts was in the '70s, and a lot of buildings were built in the '70s. A lot of schools were built in the '70s. Fifty per cent of our school buildings are now more than 40 years of age. There's a lot of work to be done. There's been a lot of maintenance work done on them over the years, but there's a lot of work to be done to modernize those school buildings that we still need and to build new in areas of growth like Edmonton-Whitemud.

In Edmonton-Whitemud there have been eight new schools built in the period of time that I've represented that constituency. I think that's the highest number of schools in the province. They're not being built because of me; they're being built because we've had phenomenal growth. Of the four new schools that were opened not this last fall but the fall before, all of them are looking for additional modulars to be attached to those schools, all of them are well over capacity, and all of them are looking for answers in terms of how they can deal with the children that they have coming to those schools and how they can find the right places for them.

To suggest that we should take our capital budget and stretch it out over a few more years so as to balance the budget as opposed to investing the capital now and amortizing it over a period of its useful life is, in my view, wrong headed. We need to invest now in the roads that help to create the economy. We need to invest now in the schools which help to invest in people and create the opportunities for our citizens. We need to do that now, and we are doing it now, and it happens to have been a very good policy to do it over the past few years, when there was a slowdown in the economy, when prices went down a little bit, and when people needed jobs. It was a good investment then, but it's still a good investment now to build those schools when we need them and not

to take the advice of the Wildrose Party, which suggests to stretch the capital funding out.

5:30

Now, they suggest: well, you could actually just prioritize your funding. They would have Albertans believe that the \$350 million, which they seem to have spent about 150 times in the last two years on different things, that is budgeted for the federal building could have just been saved. Well, a building like the federal building costs money when it's sitting empty, and that's not very good value for money, so one has to make some tough decisions sometimes. Are you going to invest in that building, or are you going to dispose of that building? What are you going to do with it? Are you just going to have costs thrown away every year? So very prudent decisions are made, but that's not money that's spent every year in the budget. That's money that's spent over the build of the project.

So you can't spend that \$350 million every year like the Wildrose would want us to do or \$2 billion for carbon capture and storage or \$2 billion for GreenTRIP. They would have us just redirect all that money. Well, I've got news for them. There isn't \$2 billion in this year's budget for carbon capture and storage or for GreenTRIP. That's money for projects which are deemed to be important, and the money is budgeted for those projects over a much longer period of time. In fact, it's similar to what they are suggesting, that we have to spread some of the things out a little bit longer. Well, news to them: we did that.

The reality is that this budget is a very important budget for Albertans. It's about investing in people. It's about ensuring that we have that balance between building the right kind of infrastructure for the right reasons and in the right places to ensure that we support the growth of the economy – the new people who are coming here, the baby boom that we've had here – and that we can support the infrastructure that we need in health, for example. It's not just the new buildings like the Calgary hospital or the Edmonton clinic, which are going to be very important as we move forward not just to service the health needs of Albertans but to find the new knowledge we need to be able to do it better – those are important investments – but it's also investing in people so that we have the people capacity to do the work, whether it's research work or whether it's nursing or whether it's doctors or whether it's otherwise delivering those services to Albertans.

So quite apart from what we've heard over the course of this afternoon about the doom and gloom of the budget or the bad projections or the failure to invest properly, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to this House that this is a very good budget for Albertans. It's the budget that Albertans asked for and want. It's the budget which maintains and builds on the programs that they want for their children, for their parents when they need it, in health or in education, that builds the infrastructure we need, and, hopefully, one that we can build on so that places like Edmonton-Whitemud, that right now has 74,000 residents, which is the largest constituency in the province until the writ is dropped and growing every day, can build the infrastructure we need so that we can invest in people in the way that we need to ensure that they can contribute back to our province in the strongest possible way.

That's the kind of Alberta that people want. That's the kind of Alberta that Edmonton-Whitemud constituents are telling me about. It has nothing to do with the type of Alberta that the members of the opposition seem to be living in.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. Calgary-Varsity, proceed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I like to be a positive person as well and make judgments based on reality and also have a degree of faith and hope for the best, but what no member of the government has indicated is the contingency, or fallback, plan. Now, we've seen circumstances within recent memory, for example, of the manipulation of the power market, where TransAlta Utilities suffered a very small fine but made almost 3 and a half million dollars. There appears to be, because I haven't heard it, and I look forward to hearing it, no backup plan.

Right now this province is still dependent for over 80 per cent of its power production on coal-fired generation, an archaic form of power generation with many negative side effects. But what happens if, because of the aging of this power infrastructure, we have repeats, that we've seen before, of three coal-fired generation plants shutting down at the same time? Surprisingly, the cost of electricity goes sailing through the roof, and we have to import it from B.C. at a considerable higher price, yet the power generators benefit from that inflated price. So there's no large motivation for them to get these monolithic coal-fired plants back in gear.

We are repeatedly, with our weather and our climate change circumstance, seeing 100-year anomaly flooding examples occurring year after year. With the climate warming, we saw this past summer the terrific fire that consumed the larger portion of Slave Lake. Previously, in 2003, we saw the Lost Creek fire, that was very devastating.

The government does not seem to be concerned about the effects of climate change and water on its practice of clear-cutting. They're clear-cutting in the southern watershed, in the Castle-Crown region. They're clear-cutting in Bragg Creek. Those clear-cutting costs are not reflected in this budget, and that's a concern I have because the residents down south, as I mentioned in my question today, from Beaver Mines east – Beaver Mines being the closest community affected by the clear-cutting – are all going to see significant increases in their water filtration costs because of the erosion that will take place. Again, the government has refused to show documentation that would prove to the contrary.

For the 1.3 million individuals living in Calgary and then add on close to another .2 million in the vicinity that are dependent on both the Bow and Elbow rivers, when you clear-cut in the Bragg Creek area and the silt runs into the river because it's no longer being held by the roots of the trees, which are no longer there, then there are considerably greater costs in the filtration process, which is not taken into account in this budget.

The minister mentioned with pride that we're not just oil and gas. We're also agriculture. We're also forestry. But if we continue to have forestry practices that are not sustainable, that actually take away from the budget as opposed to contributing to it, then we're going to be in trouble. Again, the government hasn't accounted for that. They're blissfully believing that clear-cutting is still a sustainable practice. It has been abandoned in B.C. It was never practised in Europe. It's been abandoned in the majority of southern States. There are costs associated with this failure to look at long-term sustainability.

Now, we are, as I mentioned earlier . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair is pleased to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Airdrie-Chestermere, and then Vermilion-Lloydminster in that order.

Mr. Anderson: How much time . . .

The Acting Speaker: Calgary-Currie has the floor first.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. Don't worry, Airdrie-Chestermere, you are going to get a chance to speak. If we do this right, we may even be able to vote on this before 6 o'clock because I'm not going to take a great long period of time. Lord knows, a lot of speakers so far this afternoon have.

You know, there's much on both sides of this House that I agree with in the debate that's gone on so far. I personally don't think this is that bad of a budget. I would quibble with what the Human Services minister says in that this is a very important budget for Albertans. When you're spending \$40 billion a year, every budget is very important for Albertans, not just the budgets that precede an election call.

Despite what I like or don't like about this budget – and many of those points have been covered already, Mr. Speaker – there is one very clear and specific reason why I will be voting against the Appropriation Act today, and that is because of the process that's involved in going through the estimates of the budget.

5:40

I can put it very simply and very succinctly. The amounts that we're being expected to vote on for Tourism, Parks and Recreation: expense, \$158,214,000; capital investment, \$13,582,000; non-budgetary disbursements, \$400,000. You know what? That works out to about \$170 million to \$175 million, and we spent three hours debating the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

The amounts for Health and Wellness: expenses, \$15,894,912,000; capital investments, \$77,226,000. We're basically talking about \$16 billion in Health and Wellness, the ministry responsible for the issue that repeatedly shows up as the issue that is most important to the people of Alberta, most concerning to the people of Alberta. How much time did we spend? How much time did we have to debate the estimates of the Department of Health and Wellness? Let's see. Three hours. Three hours for \$175 million; three hours for \$16 billion. That is a fundamentally flawed process.

This Legislature could do so much more, could do so much better: the 83 people who sit in here until the call of the election. I am confident the 87 people who will sit in here when the 28th Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta is convened following the election will have a great deal to contribute if only they'll be allowed to contribute. If they're allowed to work in a bipartisan or multipartisan fashion to drill down into some of these numbers and really have parliamentary-style budget hearings that allow us all to get to the facts of the matter and amend and suggest changes and so on and so forth, we will come up with better budgets.

I'm not saying that this is a bad budget. In fact, the very first time I talked about it in this House, I said that it wasn't a bad budget and that there was much about it that I agreed with. I'm a little suspicious of those sunshine-and-lollipops projections for the next two fiscal years after we get through this one coming up, but for this fiscal year there is a lot in this budget that I can support.

But why I cannot support this budget – and this is not to deny our hard-working civil servants a paycheque; this is not to deny people on AISH their payments; this is not to deny people who deserve to have schools their schools; this is not to deny health care to anybody, whether they've been intimidated or not – is because the process is flawed. We have \$16 billion at stake in one department, \$40 billion at stake overall give or take, and we spend so little time going through the details of that. The process is flawed. I will be voting against Bill 7.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Section 29(2)(a) is available.

If not, we'll proceed with the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere's comments.

Mr. Anderson: And then who is after me, Mr. Speaker? Is he here? Okay. Good.

Well, I won't take the full time – I think there is one other that wants to speak to this – but I do want to say that, obviously, I'm opposed to this budget. There are parts of it that I agree with. For example, I agree that the education build, the new school build that's outlined in the Education budget, is a priority area for Alberta. In fact, I'd like to see more resources taken from other areas of the budget and put into the Education portion of the budget, particularly in the area of new schools and upgrades and so forth.

However, there is so much significant waste that it's appalling. I've outlined that, you know, many times throughout this budget debate. I just want to say again that we have to start looking at this budget from a different perspective than we have previously. We cannot continue this game of saying that we can either have a balanced budget or we can have schools, that we can have a balanced budget or we can have new hospitals and so forth.

That is so beyond shallow of an argument. It really drives any logical thinking human being nuts because it's just absolutely not the case. You can balance the budget, and you can have the schools and health facilities that you need, but you have to be able to prioritize. You have to be able to say no to certain special-interest groups. You have to be able to say no to padding your own pockets with regard to salaries and benefits and so forth. You have to be able to say no to some things.

You know, as someone who considers himself a fiscal conservative, I was hoping, when I joined the PC Party in 2007 – well, I joined them before that but ran for them in 2007 as someone who thought he was joining a fiscally conservative party. We cannot continue in this way because fiscal conservatives don't say: one or the other. They say: we can do both. We can build what we need with what we bring in, and we will make do with that. That means putting other things off.

I hope that that mentality over time will change going into the next budget. I definitely believe and hope that it will be a Wildrose caucus that presents that next budget, to show how that's done.

Mr. Speaker, although we agree with some of the things in this budget, we do not agree with the overall idea of running yet another deficit at \$105-a-barrel oil. We think it's irresponsible. We think the projections are irresponsible. We think it's a disservice to future generations. So we will not be supporting it.

We would also add that the comments earlier that there was no tax increase in this budget are not accurate. There was a tax increase. Last year's budget: there was no tax increase in that budget. This year there was. There was a property tax increase in this budget.

As the *Herald* editorial said today, it was another broken promise by this Premier. She raised property taxes, and she didn't have to, especially since she said that she wouldn't, and to disguise it as anything else is just not the case. Calgarians and Edmontonians and Albertans from east to west in this province are going to receive higher taxes because of their decision on this.

With that, we will not be supporting this budget because of the deficit and the tax increases and several other problems in it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Section 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one, I would be pleased to recognize the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments on the budget, probably from what we would call the 50,000-foot view as opposed to individual issues. I guess the concern that I have is that the world financial markets have looked at us for quite some time now and said: "You are growing. You are spending too fast. You are in waters that are unsustainable, and it causes us concern."

I had the privilege of meeting with some of the moderating people last year, and they said: "It's not what you're spending right now, but you're building into your budget money that can't possibly continue to grow at that rate. You have to make some tough choices." Common sense, Mr. Speaker, would say that we can't be spending this much more than other provinces, yet we're not getting significantly different results.

I will give an example that I know future governments will probably deal with. What about the Education minister? I know he's very passionate about looking for money to build more schools and then is saying: but we have 40,000 empty seats in Edmonton public. I just got back from Jamaica. They run two shifts in their schools. Maybe that won't work here; maybe it will. Schools that are now empty 180 days a year could be used far more effectively. We have population centres now that can support it, in the bigger centres. Maybe it's four semesters. Maybe it's six. Maybe it's 12. And the hours of instruction per subject: put that all on the table. You won't get there if you don't say: "No. Hold it. We've got to fix some things here."

5:50

I can appreciate the work that many of the departments have done over the past few years to bring change. Industry gives us examples every day of industries that have been forced to change, and they come out of it stronger. We shouldn't be any different in government when we're challenged with making changes to our health care and our education.

I can tell you that one thing Albertans have is courage to work with you. If they know what you're trying to do, they'll work with you. They want us to make decisions. We have far more information in here than the average person on the street will ever know, and they don't want to know. They want to trust us to see the information, to make good, sound judgment calls based on our party policies or our values, and then go forward. Quite honestly, most would rather that we didn't have to spend so much time in front of them, I think.

The point that I'm trying to make is that you could use whatever projections you want. They aren't an issue with me. I always found it interesting, too, that the experts from Ontario and other large centres would come here and tell us how to save money, but I never heard what they were telling Ontario. I never heard what they were telling Quebec, who haven't got a prayer of saving money well into the next generation because of the debt they accumulated. I think that they think: "Well, they're lost causes. We might as well go to Alberta, where there's hope, and we'll tell them how to run their business. We didn't do that well here in Ontario." I'm kind of a show-me guy. If you've done a better job than Alberta, show us, and we can learn from it.

I also find interesting the people that say that we have to loosen our dependency on oil. That's a little bit like telling the farmers in Kansas that they shouldn't be counting on wheat. You know, you have to hunt where the ducks are. We're sitting on the largest pool of hydrocarbons in the world, and if we believe that the world is

not going to use oil in the near future, then we better think about changing.

It's one of the tools we've got, one of the opportunities we've got as a province. Do we need to do it right? Absolutely. Could we be leaders in research and technology? Totally. Do we need to develop new markets? Yes. And we cannot forget about lumber or agriculture. That's all part of it. Somehow being lucky or being situated on top shouldn't come with an anchor that says that you have to change just because no one else has this.

It also does cause problems, Mr. Speaker, for our other provinces. When we provide contracts for people who work for us, whether it's nurses, teachers, doctors, or whatever, it forces other provinces to do the same or lose them, and they can't afford it. They don't have the resources we've got, and it does not make our position at the Council of the Federation very popular when we spend it because we can.

I can tell you that the Minister of Human Services has often said before that it's not how much we should spend on education. It's: what do we need to spend? It's not how much money we've got or whether we need to lead the world. My last son will be in grade 12 next year. I'll tell you that he doesn't leave home till about a quarter to 9, and he's back home at 20 after 3. He's taking grade 11 matriculation. That's not much of a day. I'm not sure that we are not getting too close to the problem, getting balled up in it, saying: well, the only solution is just to do more of what we were doing.

Mr. Speaker, I know it's not easy. I know the hon. minister was correct when he said that it's what people want. People want everything. I asked at a convention last year: who wanted more roads? They put their hands up. Who wanted better health care? They put their hands up. Who wanted more schools? They put their hands up. More money for municipalities? They put their hands up. Who wants to balance the budget? They all put their hands up.

They count on us in here to make the balanced judgment decisions that are in their best interests. I know it's not easy, and I know democracy isn't always pretty, but I think that they do expect more discipline. They do expect to be told no occasionally when it's put up against the other pressures they've got. So I know it's not easy.

I'm a very positive person on the future of Alberta. There's no other place I would want to live or do business or raise a family. But you have to back up and take an approach that says: we can afford to do this this year and next year. The 7 per cent increase this year is no different than compounding interest on a bad loan. That 7 per cent is built in. The \$107 million in schools is \$187 million this year and \$245 million next year. You can say: "That's great. We'll spend everything we've got in education." But the taxpayers shouldn't be getting the education.

I'm simply saying that I know it's not easy. Thankfully, I'm not going to go and campaign for either side of this budget. But I will tell you that every dollar you build into your operating expenditures now, you have to pay for for a long, long time. I can tell you how hard it is to come back after and say: "Well, we've outgrown it. For whatever reason we don't quite have it." Then you have to start cutting it back down, and that is not as much fun as announcing new programs and new spending. It's not as much fun as trying to make everyone happy. Often, when we try to make everyone happy, we end up pleasing very few.

But I will say this. It's been an incredible experience to be involved in putting budgets together. I know that the Alberta government has some of the brightest, some of the hardest working people on the planet working in their departments, in Treasury Board, in Finance, and all the departments. I know that. I know they care very deeply about what they're trying to do, and

they are trying to accomplish what Albertans want. I came in here not having a great deal of love for government. I have a lot more respect for it now and for the people that make the Alberta government work, including the members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I will close by saying good luck to the people that are going to be implementing this on a go-forward basis, good luck to those that are running again in, apparently, the election that's nearby, and all the best to those who don't.

To you, Mr. Speaker, have a good night.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we have about four minutes left before the adjournment hour, but 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the hon. member. If he was to bring in this budget, what would he have done differently than what's in this budget?

Mr. Snelgrove: I would have made it very clear that we're going to have to find more efficiencies within it. I think they're well on the way. I know the hon. Minister of Human Services has said that you can't cut back on infrastructure; I think they have. I think there needed to be a very strong commitment to that.

The other part that I think I would probably have done is come out and said: this is what we're doing, and these are the real costs. Not necessarily too rosy a projection, but I don't think that it really shows the actual costs of some of the program increases on a go-out basis. I look over into the third years of some of the budget, and I don't see the numbers over there.

It's a little bit hypothetical – of course, I'm not there – but I think the most important part is to be able to defend the money you spend on what you've spent it on, and Albertans will generally give you a pass on that as long as you're up front. I'm not questioning projections of revenue, but I don't believe that the expenditure increases and the savings they projected in some departments down the road are going to be achievable. I think many of the departments have been squeezed over the last three or four years down to where they are just about running – if you're going to maintain them as a department, you're going to have to pay them, or you're going to have to shut down programs there.

With all due respect to the Wildrose, the fat in many departments has been trimmed down to the point where you either need

to shut it down or pay them, but there wasn't a heck of a lot of waste left last year.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Anyone else? Calgary-Varsity?

Mr. Chase: Under 29(2)(a), please, yes. The hon. member commands respect because he's been in the position of creating a budget as a former President of the Treasury Board. He knows his stuff. He's commented on the quality of the civil servants who've worked so hard to do their best work. I think every member of this House appreciates the work they've done in terms of having, actually, so much money with which to come up with a budget.

My question has to do with your opinion on saving. You've talked about making hard, responsible, sustainable, long-term choices. I'd like to hear your opinion on the need to refurbish the sustainability account and also your opinions on saving a greater portion of our nonrenewables in the heritage trust fund, if that's possible, in your opinion.

Mr. Snelgrove: In the brief time I will say this. I believe that you should look at the chance to only use from your resource revenue what a sales tax would raise otherwise. I think that can be our guiding thing, which says: if we had a 7 per cent sales tax, like our other neighbouring provinces, instead of us coming up with it, it's coming out of oil. I believe you do have to replenish your sustainability fund, but you can't do both if you don't have the revenue. You have to set targets that say, "We are not going to spend past this point," and the decisions that will be made may be tough.

I also don't believe that saving just for the sake of saving is good. I've been in business. I still am in business. The best money I've used is money I've invested to make more money. The heritage fund is a good tool, but the infrastructure and the investment in our colleges, universities, schools, in my opinion, are still very worthwhile investments, and I consider them every bit as important as a saving strategy, as an investment strategy.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to rise and interrupt this wonderful debate. However, according to our standing orders it is now 6 p.m., and I must declare the Assembly adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	663
Introduction of Guests	663
Members' Statements	
International Marketing	663
Integrity in Government	664
Retrospective by the Member for Medicine Hat	664
State of the Health Care System	664
Armenian Genocide	664
Right to Vote	665
Oral Question Period	
Health Care System	665
Education Funding	666
Provincial Budget	666
School Council Teleconference Remarks	667, 671
Pre-election Commitments	667
Century Farm and Ranch Award	668
Edith Cavell Continuing Care Centre Collective Bargaining	668
Productivity Alberta	669
Home-schooling	669
Provincial Tax Policy	670
Caribou Habitat Protection	670
First Nations Education	670
Trucking Safety Regulations	671
Student Finance System	672
Water Management	673
Notices of Motions	673
Tabling Returns and Reports	673
Tablings to the Clerk	674
Introduction of Guests	674
Orders of the Day	681
Government Bills and Orders	
Third Reading	
Bill 7 Appropriation Act, 2012	681

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