



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

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Issue 38

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
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Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
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Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W)
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC),
Government Whip

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Dorward	Rogers
Eggen	Rowe
Hehr	Sarich
Luan	Strankman
McDonald	Xiao

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Khan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Anderson
Casey
Dorward
Eggen
Kubinec
Sandhu
Sherman

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Luan

Blakeman	Notley
Dorward	Saskiw
Fenske	Wilson
Johnson, L.	Young
McDonald	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Mr. Quest
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Brown	Jeneroux
Cusanelli	Leskiw
DeLong	Notley
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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

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Forsyth	McDonald
Fraser	Quest
Kennedy-Glans	Sherman
	Smith

Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Deputy Chair: Ms L. Johnson

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Bhardwaj	Leskiw
Brown	Notley
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Kennedy-Glans	Saskiw
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Hale	Stier

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Barnes	Johnson, L.
Bikman	Khan
Bilous	Kubinec
Blakeman	Lemke
Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
Fenske	Webber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 19, 2013

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good afternoon. Just before we pray, I would ask all members to remain standing after the prayer so that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength, O Great Creator. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Dr. Walter Buck December 16, 1930, to March 14, 2013

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Dr. Walter Buck, former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, the 431st MLA sworn in, passed away on Thursday, March 14, 2013, at the age of 82 years.

Dr. Buck was first elected in the election held May 23, 1967, and served until March 20, 1989. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Clover Bar for the Social Credit Party, as an independent, and for the Representative Party of Alberta.

During his terms of office Dr. Buck served on the Select Standing Committee on Municipal Law and Law Amendments, 1968 to 1969; Select Standing Committee on Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education, 1968 to 1973; Select Standing Committee on Private Bills, Standing Orders and Printing, 1968 to 1972; Special Committee to Review the Election Act, 1968; Special Legislative Committee on Automobile Insurance, Safe Highway Design, Driver Licensing, Education and Control and Related Matters, 1968; Special Legislative Committee on Automobile Insurance, 1969; Select Standing Committee on Law, Law Amendments and Regulations, 1970 to 1972; Special Committee to Make a Recommendation to the Assembly for the Position of Ombudsman, 1973; Select Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, 1974 to 1988; Select Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, 1975 to 1976; Select Standing Committee on Public Affairs, 1975 to 1988; Select Committee Reviewing Intra-Provincial Trucking Regulations, 1975 to 1976; Select Committee on Private Bills, 1976, 1979 to 1981, and 1983 to 1985; Special Committee to Appoint a Chief Electoral Officer, 1977; Special Committee to Consider the Appointment or Reappointment of the Chief Electoral Officer, 1979; Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts, 1979 to 1981; Select Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, 1977 to 1985; Select Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act, 1979 to 1980; Select Special Committee on the Workers' Compensation Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1983; Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, 1983 to 1988; and Special Select Standing Committee on Members' Services, 1983 to 1984.

For a number of years Dr. Buck provided commentary for channels ACCESS and CTV Two of the opening of each Legislature session of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Walter was one of the founding members of the former members' association, an active association that works to maintain the values, ethics, and camaraderie of members who have served this institution.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members and their families who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them. In a moment of silent prayer I ask that all members remember the hon. member Dr. Walter Buck as you may have known him.

Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I'm honoured today to introduce to you all family members of our former colleague Dr. Walter Buck, who passed away on March 14. The family members are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I would ask as I introduce each family member that they stand, and I would ask that you honour them with the warm welcome of the Assembly after all family members been introduced: Mrs. Laura-Marie Buck, spouse; Moira Buck, daughter; David Buck, son; Bob Buck, son; Margaret Buck, daughter-in-law; Liam Buck, grandson; Emily Buck, granddaughter; Lisa Underhill, daughter; Brian Underhill, son-in-law; Ben Underhill, grandson; and Karen Frey, sister-in-law. Hon. members, please join me in welcoming the family of Dr. Walter Buck. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 50 grade 6 students and their teachers, Mr. Peter Fenton, Ms Lina Rosato, and Mrs. Erin Adams, from Sir Alexander Mackenzie. Yesterday, as you may recall, I had the privilege of introducing two ambitious grade 6 classes from SAM, and the students in attendance today represent the remaining grade 6 classes at the school. I am always so pleased visiting with the students from grade 6 learning about the Legislature, and I've found that some of the very best questions come from these future leaders. They are thoughtful, inquisitive, and their questions are awfully insightful. I believe this is a testament to their teachers, who engage, challenge, and encourage their pupils to think about their communities and our province. I would now ask these students and their teachers to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so delighted today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a fantastic group of students from John A. McDougall school, which, of course, is in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Now, these students are particularly good at debating, so I've challenged them. I'm going to go to their school once their pictures are developed, and we're going to have a really good debate about bicycle helmets. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 13 staff members from Alberta Energy. They're from the electricity, alternative energy, and carbon capture and storage division. They do great work on behalf of the citizens of Alberta. I'm pleased to welcome them to the Legislature Building today as they participate in a public service orientation tour. With that, I'd

like to ask them to rise and receive the usual welcome of the House. Thank you for your work.

1:40

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

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Linda Roussel, a constituent of Edmonton-Riverview and founder and director of Kids on Track, an organization with a 17-year track record of outstanding ministry to urban kids in Edmonton. A community health nurse for over 25 years with specialization in multicultural health services, Linda has extensive experience in connecting with parents of at-risk children and a passion for helping children and youth. Linda is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that she stand and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of very informed and intelligent high school students. My guests are part of a grassroots coalition of high school students from across the province called EdStake. Formed in response to this PC government's cuts to education, the EdStake coalition is looking for a voice in future education decision-making. They are asking for greater government accountability, particularly on issues that affect the lives of high school students. Their online campaign is growing very well and has gained media attention around the province. I would now like to ask Kuba Ilczenko, Keenan Walker, Sam Mackie, Cody Anderson, Emma Wiley-Suter, Gloria Osei, Natalia Hennady, and Connor Stephens to please stand and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Terry James. Terry braved the snowy roads and drove in from Vegreville today to watch question period. Terry is a close follower of politics and is involved in the federal Conservative Party association for the riding of Vegreville-Wainwright. This year Terry has taken over the reins as president of the association, and he's leading an active and involved board. I know all members of this Assembly owe a lot to people like Terry who get involved in their community and tirelessly volunteer their time to fight for the principles they believe in. I'd like to thank Terry and all those like him for everything that they do. I would now ask Terry to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a constituent and entrepreneur and all-around incredible woman, Dr. Emily Roback. Dr. Roback is a chiropractor by trade and founded her own practice in Calgary, Iron Mountain Chiropractic. She is also a talented athlete, speaker, and coauthor of a book, *A Silent Cheer*. She teaches hip hop classes in our school system as well as healthy living to both youth and adult alike. In fact, this month she is Global television's woman of vision. Additionally, Dr. Roback has accomplished all these feats despite being diagnosed as a child with a sensory neural hearing impairment. It is individuals like Dr. Roback that are inspirational figures who are pillars of our

community. I would ask all members to give Dr. Roback the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Please rise.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce two of my constituents, who happen to be parents of our hardest working page, Danielle Seymour. I'm privileged to introduce them to you and through you, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Michael and Gabrielle Seymour.

Members' Statements

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

Kids on Track

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud today to rise and speak about an incredible community organization that is playing a very important role for Edmonton's young people. For 20 years now Kids on Track has been offering recreational and educational opportunities for children whose socioeconomic situation may prevent them from accessing these types of activities. They deliver school clubs, family nights, parents' cafe, youth leadership training, courses to deal with loss, kids' summer camp, family celebrations like Thanksgiving, and an amazing Christmas black-light musical puppet show that my family and I thoroughly enjoyed this past season. They have a Mother's Day tea and a family picnic. Over the years this organization has helped thousands of young people cultivate enriching relationships with positive role models and learn skills and strategies that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Speaker, Kids on Track has been a funding recipient of the STEP program, which was discontinued in the 2013 budget. Our government has had to make thoughtful decisions. With a youth unemployment rate that is nearly half the national average, we're confident that the economy will continue to provide Albertans with strong job prospects. I recently had the opportunity to speak with members of the Kids on Track board about how this change will affect their organization. Initial thoughts were to consider cutting programs in response to this change. However, the organization has resolved to find new ways of continuing to deliver programs that they offer to Alberta's young people.

Mr. Speaker, the response of this dedicated team to Alberta's changing circumstances has been encouraging, to say the least. Our province was founded on an unwavering spirit of entrepreneurialism and a belief that we can do anything if we put our minds to it. Albertans see challenges as obstacles, not barriers. Kids on Track exemplifies this spirit in every way, and I'm so pleased to highlight their accomplishments and their commitment to Alberta youth here today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

National Carbon Tax

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Albertans got the clearest indication yet of where this Premier wants to take her much-hyped but seldom-defined Canadian energy strategy. The Premier floated the idea of a carbon tax, and I'm not talking about the \$15 per tonne charge the government currently collects here in Alberta. This would be a federal carbon tax.

Now, Albertans are reasonable, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want to reduce toxic emissions and greenhouse gases. So do I and my Wildrose colleagues. We know the viability of our oil sands rests on our ability to show the world that we will develop them responsibly, but a federal carbon tax just isn't the way to do it. Yet it appears that the Premier may want this to be a central plank of her grand national energy plan. She wants it to be a federally mandated carbon tax, the same kind of wealth transfer that was pushed by Stéphane Dion and Thomas Mulcair, that would see Alberta's vast resource wealth sucked out of this province and pumped into Ontario and Quebec. That's the message she took with her to Ottawa yesterday. At a time when she was supposed to be advocating for Alberta's economic interests, she proposed the most disastrous of all economic policies, a job-killing tax that would punish Canada's most productive industry and raise the price of just about everything for hard-working Alberta families.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have been fighting this eastern Canadian socialist redistribution agenda for decades. They should have a Premier who is fighting with them, not cozying up to easterners who have been angling for a greater cut of our resource wealth for a generation. Albertans expect strong leadership from their Premier. If this is her Canadian energy strategy, she can forget it. While eastern Premiers will be lining up around the block to sign on, Albertans certainly won't be. That much is guaranteed. Albertans want real reductions in emissions. Adding a new tax that will reduce our provincial wealth but do virtually nothing to reduce . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Prosecutions for First and Second Offences

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I listened with horror and sadness to the story of a homeless man stomped to death in a jail cell. His reason for incarceration: jaywalking. I've heard so many sad stories like this one for so many years both as a journalist and with a mother who worked in a probation office and a brother who worked with young offenders, so many stories of people in our justice system who live without the strong moral framework and support of a caring family or who struggle with substance abuse or mental illness. Maybe that's why I viewed the glib and thoughtless thug narrative of the opposition last week with such dismay.

Was that homeless man a thug? What about my young constituent whose abusive boyfriend has her prostituting herself in downtown Calgary for heroin? Is she a thug? In an effort to discredit anything and everything this government does to help those people in desperate situations avoid a lifetime in the justice system, they reduce the issue to a joke, a coupon to get out of jail, thus boiling a complex societal issue down to something facile and dismissive.

1:50

I find it unbelievably disturbing that, much like a house of cards, the opposition is building its social policy on a house of wanted posters and joke coupons, sending out a message to the very people we are trying to help that they should be feared, locked up: the jaywalkers, the shoplifters, the mentally ill, the drug- or alcohol-addicted. Lock them up instead of looking for ways to keep the jails free for more serious crimes, instead of offering help.

Well, in my world and in my government those people are still Albertans. Because we are as strong as our weakest citizens, we should be looking . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Oral Question Period

National Carbon Tax

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, our Premier was once again in eastern Canada musing about her national energy plan, and this time she added a new element to it. She floated the idea of a federal carbon tax. She said: "The goal is not to do something as a PR stunt; it's to actually do something that is going to make a difference to outcomes. It can be a price on carbon." Doesn't the Premier understand that a federal carbon tax would kill Alberta jobs, transfer even more money out of Alberta to the rest of Canada, and is exactly what sensible Albertans have been fighting against for a generation?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not at all surprised by the question. I think the suggestion is absurd, firstly, because in Alberta since 2007 we've had a price on carbon. We've used it to invest in a tech fund that has been effective with respect to the reduction of emissions. That is exactly what we talked about yesterday in Ottawa, and Albertans should be proud of that.

I'll tell you what a Canadian energy strategy does. It gives us joint co-operation with Brad Wall in Washington to open markets. It gets us an eastern pipeline built to open markets, and it makes sure that we can be critical . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: The Premier was talking about a national carbon tax. That is something former federal Liberal governments have proposed, but voters tossed them out before they could destroy the economy with higher prices on fuels, food, transportation, home heating, business, farm inputs – heck, call it a tax on everything – while achieving next to nothing in greenhouse gas reductions. Why does the Premier think that killing Alberta jobs and shifting more Alberta revenues out of this province is a good idea?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the suggestion that that's what the conversation was about yesterday is absolutely absurd, but I don't expect anything more from the opposition. This is another example of fearmongering, of scaring Canadians, scaring Albertans. What we were talking about was what Alberta has done. We can be proud of what we've done in Alberta to ensure that we're building markets overseas. If there are other jurisdictions that want to look at what we've done, I think they should. It's a record to be proud of, and that's what we stand by.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll table the article so that everyone can read the Premier's comments.

It looks like a job-killing federal carbon tax might actually be a central plank of the Premier's national energy strategy. It's another of her naive ideas that would cause huge problems in the real world. Why doesn't she do something to actually reduce greenhouse gases rather than promoting another damaging tax?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this is a refreshing question from a party that doesn't actually believe the science is settled. We have done something. This government introduced a price on carbon that's allowing for us to invest to impact emissions. There is only one party in this Legislature that wants to take jobs out of Alberta, and that's the NDP.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, I note that you rose on a point of order at 1:55.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition for your second set of questions.

Provincial Borrowing

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are looking for answers, trying to get a true picture of the state of Alberta's finances, but when we ask questions about debt repayment schedules, the real size of the deficit, the mammoth scope of the debt, do we get numbers or rates or amounts or totals? No. We get the Minister of Finance complaining about a Wildrose document. Now, I'm going to try again. If we assume the \$17 billion worth of debt is obtained through a 3 and a half per cent bond, it will cost \$600 million a year. That's \$12 billion in effect rent that money for 20 years. That is \$29 billion in total. Explain again, please: how is that a good deal for taxpayers?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, they're making a lot of assumptions there that are incorrect, something like their document. It's obvious from the opposition's plan that they don't support business and they don't support proper financial accounting procedures when they make outlandish statements such as that the government gave a \$1.8 million grant to Telus, a very strong corporate philanthropist in our province. That's simply not true. It's not true, but it's listed in this document as being true.

Mr. Anderson: It's in your blue book.

Mr. Horner: Hon. member, you should check your facts. You should make sure of your facts before you do that.

Ms Smith: Like I said, Mr. Speaker, he just keeps answering with our document rather than defending his own.

The minister and his front-bench pals brag about \$28 billion in capital assets that that money is going to build by 2016. Let's see what they're building. Capitals assets today are \$22 billion. In 2016 they will be \$28 billion. So we get an extra \$6 billion in assets. We'll borrow \$17 billion to be able to do that and pay \$12 billion in interest for a total of \$29 billion. How's that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it just proves that they're not really reading the numbers correctly. The \$17 billion is the accumulated debt in 2016, which includes debt that was accrued before this time period for things like – oh, I don't know – the Anthony Henday, that was a pretty good value for Edmontonians; for things like the Stoney Trail, that was a good value; for things like the schools that the hon. Member for Airdrie's children are attending. It's also the value of the assets that the municipalities have put on their books. It doesn't all show up on our books. It shows up in the consolidated financials at the end of the year, which the . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms Smith: The Finance minister is talking about paying twice, once to borrow and once for interest payments. We can do it debt free. Then there's the payback schedule or the lack of one, should I say. We understand the minister can't be precise on the terms and the interest because he hasn't actually borrowed all of that money yet, but by 2016 he will have borrowed \$17 billion, and the

payback plan that he has offered doesn't even come close to paying it off in 20 years. Why not?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the payback period is not included in the plan because we don't know what it is just yet because we haven't borrowed those funds. I'm not going to put in there the term of a mortgage when I have no idea whether the term is going to be five, 10, 15, or 20 years because we haven't done that yet. Strong financial management means you make good financial decisions. You don't simply make a list of the things that you're not going to do and call that a budget.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, your third set of questions.

Generic Drug Price Reduction

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this Health minister has sure made a mess of things. He's got big trust issues with doctors right now, that we've all heard about, and he's about to take on another critical component of front-line health care delivery and wreck that, too. Earlier changes to the way pharmacies are paid for dispensing medications have already threatened many small, independent pharmacies, but the new changes threaten the big-chain drugstores, too. Will the minister commit today to halt his destructive plans and actually listen to what the pharmacists are telling him?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the pharmacists of Alberta are telling us is that they very much like the idea of being treated as full partners and paid as professionals in our health care system. This government last year implemented a pharmacy services framework that pays pharmacists to provide services to Albertans like renewing prescriptions, like developing care plans as part of a primary health care team, and like managing complex medication issues for patients. The way forward for pharmacists – and we're working with them – is to treat them as full partners in the team, much more than they could expect under the Official Opposition.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this Health minister just is not listening to what pharmacists are saying. Drugstores regardless of size have significant inventories of medications on hand.

The minister's ill-conceived plan announced in the budget will force pharmacies to sell medications at a fraction of what they paid for them, meaning that they will have to absorb hundreds of thousands of dollars, even millions of dollars worth of losses. Why is the minister intent on wrecking this important component of front-line health care service delivery?

2:00

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we welcome the question because, quite frankly, we've been waiting for the opposition to stand up and make an argument as to why Albertans – the government programs that we provide, employers that employ Albertans and provide benefit plans, and people out of their own pocket – should pay more than the best price we can get for generic drugs in this province, and now she's made that argument. The fact of the matter is that this government has poured over \$95 million into transitional funding over the last four years to support pharmacists moving to a new professional services framework. We have an implementation advisory committee that we're working with now on the latest generic price reduction.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms Smith: Let me make this clear for the minister, Mr. Speaker. The effect on customers, patients, and care providers of this draconian proposal is going to be devastating. Pharmacies will close. Drug shortages will increase. Prescription service for seniors and long-term care patients will suffer. It is a pretty grim legacy because the minister won't listen to the pharmacists. How many more mistakes, blunders, foul-ups will we have to endure from this minister?

Mr. Horne: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, the rather startling rhetoric from the Leader of the Opposition belies her lack of understanding of the basic economics that underlie the situation. The evidence in Ontario, for example, where generic drug prices have been reduced, is that the number of pharmacies has actually increased. The evidence is that when we pay pharmacists to provide the services they are trained to provide and they are regulated to provide by their own college, patient safety, patient quality, and team-based care delivery prosper. Those are the economics.

The Deputy Speaker: I will recognize the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Environmental Policy

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is hopelessly confused when it comes to environmental policy, and it's hurting Alberta's reputation and, in turn, our economy. In today's *Edmonton Journal* the Premier called for the federal government to impose a levy on major carbon emitters. Just hours later her office claims that she said no such thing. The government doesn't know if it's coming or going. To the Premier: instead of wasting taxpayers' money on ads in the *New York Times* trying to spin your government's environmental failures, why don't you get your act together, follow the Alberta Liberal lead, and bring in credible environmental policy?

Ms Redford: Oh, Mr. Speaker, where to begin? An investment in an ad in the *New York Times* for \$30,000 that told the facts about our environmental record, the fact that we're having a positive impact and that we can be proud of our record with respect to environmental sustainability – there is no doubt that we need to make an investment. We are committed to ensuring that we are communicating the facts. Frankly, one of the reasons we have to do that is because we have the leader of the NDP in Washington spreading mistruths with respect to our environmental record. We will keep investing for Albertans, we will keep informing Americans, and we will . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier confuses spin with facts.

Given that one of the main reasons for the so-called bitumen bubble is this government's reliance on a feeble and ineffective intensity-based carbon levy, which brings in a minuscule \$80 million while helping opponents of the oil sands – those on the far left win PR battles against pipelines to the south and west coast – to the Premier: when will you put a carbon tax on actual emissions so that we can raise significantly more revenue, \$1.8 billion for large emitters, incent a . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Oh, my goodness, I really hope that some of the leaders of the opposition actually have a chance to travel outside

the borders of this province, Mr. Speaker, and see what the real conversation that's going on is. We are committed to building Alberta, and we made a commitment to Albertans to do that by building markets, a Canadian energy strategy where we can partner with Quebec, with New Brunswick, with Nova Scotia to make sure that we're building pipelines, to make sure that we're partnering with Brad Wall to talk about the good story that we're doing in Canada while we're in Washington, and to ensure that we're allowing every opportunity for markets to be open and product to be exported. That's a Canadian energy strategy, and it's time that people . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the Premier has been flying too high in first class.

Given that another important aspect of this government's poor environmental reputation is the fact that we have industry monitoring industry and we're just supposed to take their word for it, to the Premier: when will you demonstrate to our friends in America and British Columbia that we are serious about the environment by moving away from the completely ineffective and laughable system of industry self-monitoring and introduce credible independent monitoring, strict enforcement of the rules, and implement the strongest pipeline safety and risk management plan in the country?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wasn't actually sure where the leader of the Liberal Party was until today, but now it's pretty clear. We have someone who has joined the NDP in standing up and saying that our environmental record in Alberta isn't good enough. That's not good for Alberta, and it's not good for Canada. We're going to keep telling the story of what our success has been, that we have productive results in respect of the decisions that we put in place because that's what opens up markets, and that's what people want to know, the facts.

The Deputy Speaker: The leader of the ND opposition.

Bitumen Upgrading

Mr. Mason: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this Premier makes regular pilgrimages to Washington to convince the United States to take our jobs by approving the Keystone pipeline. She also tries to convince them that Alberta has a good environmental record in the oil sands. Good luck with that. Yet when anyone tries to stand up for Alberta jobs and responsible resource development, she calls them un-Canadian. To the Premier: does she really believe that everyone who disagrees with her on Keystone is un-Canadian?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the Keystone pipeline is going to be fundamental to Alberta's and Canada's economic growth; 1 in 6 Albertans is directly or indirectly employed by the energy industry. Last week I went to a reception with the building trades, and half of the conversation we had in the speeches from trade unions was about the importance of getting Keystone built. It impacts our economy. We understand it, and the hon. leader does not.

Mr. Mason: Here's a quote for the Premier: I prefer that we process the bitumen from the oil sands in Alberta and that we would create a lot of jobs and job activity; that would be a better thing to do than merely send the raw bitumen down the pipeline and refine it in Texas, and that means thousands of new jobs in

Texas. Does the Premier think that Peter Lougheed was un-Canadian for saying that?

Ms Redford: In fact, Mr. Speaker, I was surprised that Premier Lougheed said it because it sounds exactly like what I would have said. We have a diverse economy in this province. We refine, we upgrade, and we export. People have to understand, as Premier Lougheed did and as this side of the House does, that you have to actually develop products that people want to buy in an environmentally sustainable way to open markets. That's what we're doing. That's responsible, and that's what builds jobs in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's difficult to ask questions to a Premier that doesn't know the difference between fact and fiction. There's one large difference between Mr. Lougheed and this Premier. Peter Lougheed was not in the pockets of the oil industry. He stood up to them in Alberta's interests time and time again. Will the Premier follow his example and insist that bitumen be upgraded here in Alberta, and if not, why not?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we are proud of our government's record in investing with our own resources, with Alberta's resources in the North West upgrader, which is doing exactly that. I'll tell you that the best way to build an economy is to work in partnership with everyone – with industry, with stakeholders, with environmental NGOs, with public policy makers, with our customers overseas – not to have a divisive approach, not to do what this leader of the NDP is doing in Alberta, and not to do what the leader of the NDP is doing in Washington, purportedly in the best interests of Canada when it's not.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-North West.

Generic Drug Price Reduction (continued)

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In many communities across Alberta pharmacists are the front door to health care, yet this government is reducing generic drug fees by 18 per cent to pharmacists, which is already having a negative impact. Pharmacists in Alberta work hard to provide medications to seniors in continuing care centres and lodges. Pharmacists are warning that these changes will prevent them from being able to provide medications to these facilities, leaving the delivery of important drugs to vulnerable seniors at risk. Does the Minister of Health recognize that your plan may result in seniors in care not receiving their medications?

2:10

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are very closely in touch with pharmacists across the province, ever since I can remember, and certainly very close since we last lowered the price of generic drugs in Alberta. We are the only government in Canada who has provided transition funding for pharmacists, including \$15 million for rural and remote pharmacists, to support exactly the pharmacists that the hon. member is talking about. It is possible for Albertans to enjoy lower generic drug prices and for us to provide a competitive and prosperous environment for pharmacists across this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the Health minister's plan to provide medications to seniors in care once the pharmacists are forced out of business by this government's ill-informed actions?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the hon. member ignores the facts. I've gone through the facts a couple of times today alone. We provided financial support for pharmacists to transition to the new professional services framework. In fact, since we last reduced generic prices, from 45 to 35 per cent of brand name, the number of pharmacists in Alberta has gone up, from 1,003 to 1,024. How is this not supporting pharmacists?

Mrs. Towle: Pharmacies all over this province will close. When will this government trust our dedicated and compassionate front-line pharmacists and get back to the negotiating table to ensure that those in care have safe and stable medication delivery?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this is a little bit beyond the pale. To suggest that somehow seniors across this province are at risk today as a result of changes that have been made in reduced generic drug prices, that the hon. members opposite should be standing up and applauding because it delivers better value for taxpayers, is a complete mythology that, I'm sure, will only be perpetuated. The fact of the matter is that we're continuing to work with pharmacists. They derive revenue from sources other than dispensing fees. They have the advantage of the new professional services framework. There are other options, and we'll continue to work with pharmacists to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Market Access for Oil

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. The leaders of the provincial and federal NDP have been on the warpath, spreading fear about the Keystone XL pipeline. Is this pipeline, as they claim, an environmental disaster and a harbinger of massive job loss, or is this what Alberta needs for much-needed economic growth?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, it is rather unfortunate what leaders of the NDP both federally and provincially have been espousing both in Washington and here in the House. Let's not forget the recent past because NDP both provincially and federally have been against the building of refineries and upgraders in this province. It wasn't so long ago that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's constituency office manager was rappelling from rafters, during a Premier's dinner, against big oil. You can't have it on both sides. You can't oppose pipelines and oppose upgrading yet say that you are for creating jobs.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Deputy Premier. The leader of the NDP is pretty insistent that the impact of Keystone XL on jobs north of the border is going to be massive. What do you do to make sure we increase jobs in the oil sector here in Alberta?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, you know, we have many ways to sell our products in this province. We can upgrade them here. We can refine them here. We can ensure that we sell them from here as relatively raw resources. We do all of that. In fact, in a community

where we have between 4 and 5 per cent unemployment, surely we're doing a good job. This is a great place to invest. I would point to companies like Williams, that in the last couple of days has just taken another step on improving the upgrading and the value-added that's going on right here in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Energy minister: what's your strategy for coalition building knowing that we have the support of industry, of unions, and of other provinces?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has worked hard to work with everybody, the coalition of the willing if I can call them that. We're prepared to work together to export our products, to make sure that we're aligned. We're working with First Nations leadership. We're working with union leadership. We're working with political leadership right across this country to look after Canadians.

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

Bathing Protocols for Persons in Care

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we learned of yet another bath scalding incident in a government-operated care home. This brings the total number of scalding incidents to three in just under 16 months, a statistic that is simply deplorable. Following the incident the associate minister said, quote: we've got to get to the bottom of this. Quite frankly, I agree with him. To the hon. associate minister: what exactly is your ministry doing to get to the bottom of this?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question, and I agree with him. It is an unacceptable situation. If the hon. member knows of the incident, he obviously knows what the press release said about exactly what we are doing. There is an investigation going on right now under the Protection for Persons in Care Act. While that's going on, we're again reviewing procedures. Bathing protocols: are they posted? Are all the valves working? We're going over it with all of our care providers again.

Mr. Wilson: Given the seriousness of this issue what consequences will there be if during your investigation it's discovered that error or neglect was in place?

Mr. Oberle: It would be speculation right at the moment, Mr. Speaker, to say that there are consequences. I don't know what the results of the investigation are going to be, and I don't know that any fault is going to be found, so I'll wait for the results of that investigation.

Mr. Wilson: Given that your government implemented a list of recommendations after previous scalding incidents and that those are clearly not having the desired effect, what is your ministry doing to protect vulnerable Albertans in care to ensure that these incidents do not happen again?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I thank the member for acknowledging that we did in fact implement the recommendations, Mr. Speaker. We continue to install and check mixing valves. We're now doing random inspections. We have done training. We've spent millions

of dollars on that program. We're ensuring that bathing protocols are posted at every facility. It now takes two people to provide the bath. We're working on the issue, we believe we're doing everything we can, and we will solve this issue.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-East, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Seniors' Benefits Program

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the budget was released on March 7, I have received numerous phone calls and e-mails from my constituents concerned with the changes to seniors' benefits. I need to be able to reassure my constituents that we will continue to provide for their needs. Given that over 9,000 seniors will be affected by changes to the seniors' benefits, can the Associate Minister of Seniors explain what these changes are?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Seniors.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for being such a strong advocate for seniors in his constituency. Let's remember that the intention of the seniors' benefits program has been to supplement the GIS and old-age security programs that the feds have. What we did in Budget 2013 was harmonize the eligibility of our program with theirs, so you have to be a 10-year resident of Canada to apply. The income exemptions that no longer will be exempted: worker's compensation benefits, alimony payments, and CPP disability payments.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same associate minister: can you explain how these changes will affect low-income seniors in the province since they are the most affected by this change?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to explain to the member very, very clearly that it's the cash benefit of the seniors' benefits program that residents that have not lived in Canada for 10 years will not be eligible for. The benefit programs like the Alberta Blue Cross coverage, the dental and optical, the special-needs assistance program for one-time extraordinary costs will still be there for those citizens. Thirty-five hundred seniors currently receiving the benefit that no longer will meet the residency equivalent is a payment of about an average of \$95.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. associate minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same associate minister: given that the federal government has given Canadians 10 years' notice of their intent to change seniors' benefits, are we providing the same notice, and if not, why not?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you again for that question. In fact, what the federal government is doing is saying to 55-year-olds today: get ready; in 2023 you'll have to be 67 years old to apply for the old-age security benefit program. Provinces across the nation will have to have their own discussions about this, and all of us – all of us – in our constituencies have to get the point across to our younger people. Fifty-five years and younger: get

ready; plan for retirement. At 67 years old you'll qualify for benefits, not 65 years old.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

2:20 English Language Learner Programs

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, to give credit where credit is due, I'd like to congratulate the hon. Minister of Education on reaching a tentative deal with Alberta teachers. Although I question some of his negotiating tactics, who am I to argue with the results?

In any event, between 2006 and 2011 Alberta was the only province in Canada where reading skills for English language learners decreased. Can the minister give reasons for this dramatic drop in performance?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that the education system in Alberta is one of the best in the world and one of the best in the English-speaking world, which we repeatedly see and repeatedly hear about. I think we're all very proud of the education system in Alberta, very proud of the teachers, and we're very proud of the results. Obviously, literacy is a very important aspect of that, and one that we'll be focusing on on a daily basis going forward.

Mr. Hehr: Nevertheless, though, I'd like to try that question again. Alberta learners in grade 4 have seen significant dropping in their reading comprehension over the course of the last five years. Can you tell me why?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'd prefer to talk about the great things that are happening in our education system. There's no question that literacy rates are important and reading and writing and numeracy and literacy are foundational, and they're going to be core pieces of our curriculum going forward. I think sometimes we put too much weight on some of the testing that comes at us all the time, international testing and some of the local testing. Talk to the teachers about the PATs and the concerns they have with those. I think one of the big things we have to focus on is the students in those core competencies that we're moving the system towards.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that the testing was primarily looking at English language learners in Alberta schools, why are we decreasing the support to English second-language students from seven years to five years when the results of their test scores are clearly going down?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, yes, it's true; we've got a lot more new Albertans and new Canadians coming to the province. Those have impacts on these test scores, absolutely, and we need to as a province continue to invest in that and put resources in those areas. Let's not get too skewed by some of the test results coming at us. We will continue to invest in those areas. This member knows that the budget debate and the estimates for the Education ministry are up in about an hour here. We can talk about this at great length, and we can tell him what we're doing with the ESL and how we are continuing to invest in that going forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

School Class Sizes

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, you just can't trust this government to stand up for students in this province. Last year the PCs talked about the importance of stable, predictable funding for schools, but now the Premier has broken her promises to Alberta students and their families. Even the Education minister admits that budget cuts to public schools mean that class sizes will increase. Will the Education minister please explain how we can defend these budget cuts while admitting that they're not in the best interests of Alberta students and will increase class size?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, what is in the best interests of Alberta students is to have a strong, sustainable education system going forward. It's great to see the hon. member introducing the students here today and the active involvement they're taking in their education. I hope that they might join us for some of the budget estimates coming up in the next hour.

This is a difficult budget, but let's not characterize these as direct cuts to Education. The Premier has clearly protected the Education file in this budget. It's one of the few ministries that actually isn't getting a hard cut.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this PC government is cutting funding to school boards and hoping that they can cope with 11,000 new students and given that at least half of Edmonton's high school classes have already 30 or more students, sometimes many more, as I learned this afternoon from our guests, will the minister please explain why he rejects the Commission on Learning's recommended class-size limits, and tell us, in his opinion, just how crowded is too crowded?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear that not every board is seeing cuts. Some boards are seeing increases of up to 5 per cent. There's no question, again, that this is a challenging budget. We're trying to make sure that every dollar we have gets into the classroom. The two areas – oddly enough, the member brings them up – where we maintained our commitment, where we increased funding were on the class-size initiative and on inclusion. Those are two areas that parents, students, and teachers in particular told us to protect. We are investing in class size. We do believe in that, and it's a great investment, but we need to keep in mind also that it's the makeup of that class.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that every time this PC government cuts staff in schools, they end up hurting Alberta students and increasing class sizes and given that the amount of money that he's putting into the class size initiative is way dwarfed by the huge size of the cuts in the first place, will the minister admit that he and the Premier are forcing Alberta students to pay the price for this government's poor budgeting practices?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's nice to see the member admit that we are increasing funding for class sizes. I appreciate that. I agree that that is a good investment. One of the challenges we were faced with in this budget is that when you have limited

dollars and you have increased enrolment, how are you going to make sure that every dollar that you have ends up in a classroom and ends up going towards instruction? So we have thrown out some strong challenges to school boards. We have cut and eliminated some of the funding envelopes that we have that are not directly impacting instruction in the classrooms so that we can make sure the impacts on those classrooms . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Nursing Workforce

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, as a result of this government's back-in-debt budget, the internationally educated nurses' assessment program at Mount Royal University has been dropped. This program helped address nursing shortages by transitioning nurses trained abroad to work in Canada. In November the chair of AHS said that there will be a nursing job for absolutely every qualified nurse who wants to work with Alberta Health Services because we need everyone. Is the Minister of Health now saying four months later that we don't need more nurses?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the program to which the hon. member refers did not discontinue as a result of a funding cut. Mount Royal University made a decision to discontinue the nursing assessment program. This initiative began in 2006, when today's Minister of Human Services, the then Minister of Health, recognized the growing nursing shortage – international nursing shortage, as a matter of fact – and took steps to provide assessment services for foreign-trained nurses who wished to come to Alberta. This continues to be a priority for government. We're working with the College and Association of Registered Nurses.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Given that just a couple of months ago the Minister of Health said that he didn't know of any health minister in Canada that wasn't struggling with the issue of how to hire and retain more nurses and given that this program adds 240 nurses to the front lines every year, how does this minister not see the devastation this will cause to the front lines?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, a responsible approach to ensuring adequate nursing supply for our health workforce certainly involves looking at opportunities to provide assistance to foreign-trained nurses who wish to practise in Alberta. It also involves a very careful consideration of factors that allow us to employ more of the nurses that are trained in Alberta and more on a full-time basis. As the hon. member should know, it currently takes 2.88 nurses in the province of Alberta to fill one full-time position. So it's a more complex problem than the hon. member presents, and we'll continue to attack it on all fronts.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Given that thousands of Alberta nurses are nearing retirement age, can the advanced education minister – maestro, as he puts it – explain why his plan to dictate to universities what programs they can provide means fewer nurses now and continued pressure on our health care system?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if you were paying attention over the last few days to the line of questions coming from the Wildrose, but while they are criticizing this government

for apparently going into debt and not cutting deeply enough into the programs offered by the government of Alberta, every single member on that side has been rising to ask for more programs, not cutting programs and not eliminating programs. I have no idea what school they went to and what mathematics courses they took, but if they really want us to cut much deeper, as they would do if they ever had an opportunity, they can't be rising and asking for more programs.

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

2:30 Generic Drug Price Reduction (continued)

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been speaking with pharmacists in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie, and we've all been hearing in the media that this new budget will negatively impact pharmacies everywhere, in particular those operating in rural communities. At the same time Alberta strives to be small-business friendly. My questions are to the Minister of Health. Can the minister tell us what the immediate and cumulative impact of this budget will be on Alberta pharmacies, both rural and urban?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. In terms of the impact of the generic drug price reduction on pharmacists that will vary according to the pharmacy and their particular arrangements with suppliers to purchase drugs. But the future lies not in relying on generic prices in order to adequately compensate pharmacists; the future relies on exactly what we've been doing for the past four years, paying pharmacists for the services that they are trained to provide and that they legally can provide and fairly compensating them for those services.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the transitional funding promised by the government be sufficient to mitigate both the short-term and long-term consequences of this budget for the pharmacies?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are the only government in Canada to provide transitional funding for pharmacists in connection with generic price reductions. While we are later than most provinces in reducing these prices, we were the first in Canada to provide a transition fund of over \$95 million to support pharmacists; \$15 million of that is devoted to rural and remote pharmacists across the province, and \$10 million of the \$15 million has yet to be allocated. We're meeting with the Pharmacists Association today to talk about how we can best use that \$10 million along with other initiatives, all related to professional . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education. What other initiatives are being taken, if any, to help small businesses thrive in Alberta?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think everyone in this House realizes that small businesses continue to be the largest employers

of Albertans, and they are pivotal to the backbone of our economy. There are a number of services offered such as Business Link through the government of Alberta, or there are organizations like Startup Edmonton that help small businesses to develop and grow into larger enterprises. Recently we created a new website for small businesses that helps them to deal with the regulatory regime and cut the regulatory burden on businesses as well. So we're working with small businesses, realizing the importance of them not only as contributors to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Health and Safety Questions from Airdrie Constituents

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, today I have three health and safety questions on behalf of constituents. On January 15 the Airdrie urgent care centre received a letter from AHS stating that all nurse practitioners in Airdrie were being let go. This was a shock for our growing community of 45,000 people. Fortunately, local health professionals and community leaders were able to convince AHS of their mistake, and the decision was put on hold to be reviewed. To the Health minister: can you please commit to the people of Airdrie and region that their nurse practitioners will not be yanked out of our already overcrowded urgent care centre?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his concern about his constituents and their access to the health care that they need. The hon. member answered his own question when he indicated that AHS has stated that they will take another look at the situation. There are many services that nurse practitioners provide, that they are trained to provide, and that they can provide very well in environments where they practise with doctors and also without. The goal is to make best use of the Health human resources, those dedicated professionals that we have, to match patient need in given communities. I'm sure, as AHS takes a look at this, that is what they will keep as top of mind.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Anderson: Leave our nurses alone, Minister.

My supplemental is for the Transportation minister. Given that I have several constituents who regularly travel north to Fort McMurray for work and given that they are telling me that the portion of highway 63 north of Fort McMurray running to the actual oil sands projects themselves is not being properly salted, sanded, and is essentially lawless, resulting in several recent fatalities, will the minister commit to doing a better job of maintaining this road for winter driving conditions and ensuring adequate safety enforcement on this road moving forward?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. We, of course, have contracts across the province with independent contractors to do the maintenance on the roads. When we get complaints, we pass that on and have steps to take to make sure that happens. I'll consider whether this is one of those complaints, so I will take that under advisement. I can assure the hon. member that we have procedures in place, that the people we contract with are required to keep the roads in a safe and passable condition. Of course, as always, unfortunately, we depend upon Albertans to drive in a defensive way.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. member, just a reminder that supplementals ought to follow the same line of questioning, so I hope you'll be able to do that. Your second supplemental.

Mr. Anderson: You want me to be meaner, Mr. Speaker? I can be meaner. Okay.

The final supplemental is for the Health minister. Given that I have a constituent that suffers from multiple sclerosis who needs to fill thousands of dollars in prescriptions every month, which she does at Safeway because they give her Air Miles for filling them there, which she then uses to travel to climates that help her cope with her condition, and given that her husband tells me that there is a movement under way to prohibit Safeway from offering incentives like Air Miles for filling prescriptions there and given that this seems very anticompetitive, unwarranted, and will hurt regular folks, Minister, can you assure my constituents that you will not permit this to happen?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, based on my understanding as to what I think I heard from the question, the hon. member is asking about loyalty programs and inducements and the extent to which, if at all, they are permitted in the practice of pharmacy in the province. As the hon. member knows, that is an issue that has been raised by the College of Pharmacists in Alberta. They have asked government to consider the issue. I know that the hon. member's constituent may have the opportunity to benefit from lower generic drug prices in the near future, and that's certainly one of the thoughts behind that initiative. As to the loyalty programs, we're in discussions.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Smart Grid Electricity Technology

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, last summer an explosion in Calgary caused power outages as much as 18 and a half kilometres away from the point of the accident. With smart grid technologies the outage could have been contained to a localized area. Technologies could also create efficiencies in power distribution and reduce peak power usage. Last year an APEC committee recommended that smart grid interoperability standards should be pursued as a core objective in economy-wide programs. My questions are for the Minister of Energy. When will his department implement a smart grid road map to guide the development and deployment of smart grid technologies in this province?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the member. You know, smart grid is actually a term that describes many different kinds of technologies, all of which take us in a certain direction of a more responsive electricity grid. In 2011 the Alberta Utilities Commission delivered a report which indicated that Alberta's grid is actually already deploying many of these many technologies. There are others out there that haven't been yet. I would note in passing, though, that the government of Alberta does not have plans to introduce smart . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Brown: When will that minister employ his department to mandate Alberta utility companies to work together by implementing some sort of interconnectivity and interoperability in the system?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, clearly, all utility companies in this province have an obligation to work together and to ensure that they have the best performing system that we can possibly have in this province. Representatives from both the Alberta Utilities Commission and the AESO, the system operator, have contributed to building these North America-wide standards. So we're very much in the game, we're very much part of the leadership of this, but of course it always has to be an economic proposition as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, finally, will the minister consider promoting the use of household-based instrumentation, which can divert the peak energy usage and lower the cost to consumers? [interjections]

Mr. Hughes: I appreciate the question and the enthusiasm from the back row over there.

Mr. Speaker, this government, obviously, earlier this year took strong actions to protect consumers. Just recently, in January, we took steps to ensure that there is greater cost scrutiny of the transmission systems. We've increased market competition, and we've increased price stability. This will lead to more stable, lower prices for Albertans over time and a very stable supply.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

2:40

Food Safety Regulations

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Churches, legions, and community halls are where small towns come together. The men and women who volunteer in these facilities have been preparing food for their friends and neighbours for generations. Now our community volunteers are under attack, and I keep getting letters about this. They can't cook without a time-consuming food prep course. They can't serve without a costly serving course certificate. To the Minister of Health: why does the government think our local volunteers and senior citizens are incapable of preparing food without AHS looking over their shoulders?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government applauds the efforts of volunteers across the province in the large cities and in smaller communities, and we recognize the contribution that they make. That said, there is a requirement for public health regulations and inspection and enforcement across the province in order to ensure that food consumed is safe, and that involves safe preparation. If the hon. member has a particular concern about an incident in his own constituency, I invite him to send me the details. I'd be glad to investigate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Bikman: Given that people in small communities often bring food to events after they've cooked them at home and given that AHS managers are used to dining out on expensive meals, is the Minister of Health prepared to eliminate rules that prevent volunteers from preparing food at home and then serving it at community-sponsored events?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the hon. member would agree that he would not want the Minister of Health nor any other elected member of this House to make very critical decisions about the safe preparation and serving of food in our province. So if there's a particular question about a particular aspect of the

Public Health Act or the regulations that the member wants us to investigate, I'd be very pleased to receive that information.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. member. Final supplemental, without preamble.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will do that. Given that local volunteers are reaching out and telling the minister that these bureaucratic rules and regulations are harmful to smaller communities, is the government prepared today to commit to cutting this kind of unnecessary government red tape?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I absolutely empathize with the spirit of the hon. member's question, but I'm sure he would agree that the responsibility of government to the citizens of this province is to ensure quality and safety in the preparation and the serving of food regardless of the size of the function or the community in which the event takes place. This is an issue that I think many of us have encountered. I'm very happy to continue to work with AHS and to look at specific aspects of the regulation that may be concerning to the hon. member. But I as a layperson am not going to make that decision.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, today we got through 16 sets of questions. I thank you for your co-operation. In 30 seconds I'll recognize the next set of members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Senator Joyce Fairbairn

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Senator Joyce Fairbairn has retired from the Senate of Canada having served her country, her province, and her constituents on Parliament Hill for over half a century.

Joyce was born in Lethbridge, Alberta. She is a graduate of the universities of Alberta and Carleton as a journalist and became known as the first female newswoman in the parliamentary news gallery and also was with the bureau of United Press International. She served with Prime Minister Trudeau as legislative assistant and communications director. She served in the Senate for 25 years with passion, dedication, and energy.

She has also been at the forefront of fighting for those whose voices are often marginalized, ignored, or disregarded. Literacy for all Canadians was where she left a remarkable legacy, and she was respected from coast to coast for the programs she helped establish.

She represented Canada at the Nagano Paralympics, and it became a defining moment as she continued to work tirelessly for the Paralympic athletes.

She represented an extension of the Famous Five women's accomplishments. She, too, was a pioneer, blazed trails for women to follow but also to create their own trails. Always with Joyce it was about the job and not about her, and unfortunately, consequently, there are no personal journals or diaries of this remarkable woman, to whom all Canadian women owe so much.

My words have only scratched the surface. In Lethbridge she is Senator Joyce, deeply loved and respected as the lady in red and a woman of great distinction.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Jean (John) Raymond Spenard

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about the spirit of the people of Alberta, that I was privileged this weekend to witness. My weekend was no different than that of any other member here, a calendar of community events to attend and constituents to meet, but I was given reason to reflect on the people behind these events. You see, a long-time member of the Bowness community had passed.

Jean Raymond Spenard spent decades feeding people, first at the old Bowness Hotel, then at the Bowness Seniors Centre, where he volunteered running the kitchen. I last saw Jean just a few weeks ago. He was hooked up to oxygen and using a walker, but arms folded, eyes following each of the volunteers serving his food, he made sure that everything was done to his exacting standards. Well, Mr. Speaker, on Saturday well over 250 people attended a celebration to recognize Jean's life well spent.

This caused me to reflect on the numerous people throughout Alberta who give up their time and energy to make their communities a better place, people like Christine Webster and the parents and teachers who organized and ran the Bowness big band dance on Friday night, raising funds for the music program at the high school; people like the members of Foothills United church that organized, cooked, and served a delicious beef stew for the community at their St. Patrick's Day dinner; or people like Andrew Shorter and the other hard-working members of the Crestmont Community Association board, who gathered for their annual general meeting on Sunday afternoon despite the snow blowing down around Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, we are grateful for these constituents. All of my colleagues here at the Legislature witness the contributions and sacrifices that Albertans make every day. As MLAs we're privileged to see just what it is that makes this province great.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Blackfalds Concerns

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and read a letter written to this government by the mayor of Blackfalds, Melodie Stol. Mayor Stol isn't interested in scoring political points. Her concerns are real and honest. This government likes to pass budgets without considering the people they affect, and I hope they recognize hearing this letter as the privilege that it is. She writes:

Over the past week our Council and administrative staff have been reviewing the proposed 2013 budget and [its] ramifications on our community. It is my duty and responsibility on behalf of the Council of Blackfalds to highlight to you the consequences that the change of education property tax requisition has on our community.

The \$600,000 increase translates into a 39.5% residential tax increase on our residents. In real dollars, we will have families facing tax increases of \$400 to \$500. How can our government profess to have a budget of no tax increases that will result in families paying so much more every year? Further, Blackfalds has been waiting for the Province to provide new schools locally and we have not had our needs met. Our schools are bursting at the seams. Our elementary school has been on the capital plan for modernization for over 10 years! Yet we are being asked to pay 39.5% more for inadequate local school infrastructure.

The province has seen fit to offer transitional mitigation measures to 4 communities to help transition over the next two and three years. Blackfalds has been left out . . . Certainly this huge burden of a tax increase is not what you envisioned for the blue collar workers and families that make up Blackfalds' population.

Mr. Speaker, Mayor Stol is fearful for her community. Blackfalds feels ignored, dismissed, and disrespected. Shame on this government for downloading their deficit onto the backs of honest, hard-working communities like Blackfalds.

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a *Calgary Herald* article dated September 14, 2011, which covers former Premier Lougheed's opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline on grounds that it will ship jobs to the U.S. and also includes a quote from the now Minister of Municipal Affairs and MLA for Battle River-Wainwright wherein when asked about the U.S. rejecting the Keystone project, he said: "I wouldn't be upset. I'd smile and say, 'Great, we'll upgrade it here, and we'll ship it to somewhere that does want it.'" Apparently he, too, is un-Canadian.

The second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of submissions received from Albertans made to our prebudget tour, which visited seven cities in February. For example, Polly writes:

As a teacher I am extremely concerned about cuts to education. I feel as though promises . . . to teachers were never taken seriously . . . How am I supposed to ensure my students have a stand up education when I have to teach 32 10 year olds?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, did you have another tabling for the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood?

Ms Notley: That was one of them.

The Deputy Speaker: That was it? Okay. Wonderful. Thank you.
I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the report I mentioned in question period. It's the Canadian Results from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, which clearly shows that the results of our grade 4s in terms of reading comprehension are on the decline from where they were five years ago.

The second tabling I have is an article from Richard Cuthbertson of the *Calgary Herald* which discusses this report and has a quote in it from Jim Dueck, a former assistant deputy minister, who retired a couple of years ago. He said, "I'm embarrassed by (the results), as a province."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter from the president of the Alberta Medical Association to members calling for clarity around the negotiating process and a willingness of the government to come back to the table and present a clear approach to solving this two-year-old conflict.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of one of many e-mails we received about this PC government's cancellation of the STEP program. Justin McDonald is a university student from Edmonton who was able to gain invaluable experience through the STEP program by working with the Writers Guild of Alberta for a summer. He writes, "The small investment STEP makes in students gives them enormous support in realizing their potential and finding success in a position that matters to them."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter written by one of my constituents, a very bright and well-spoken 20-year-old, Calvin Timmerman, on behalf of the Association for Reformed Political Action. The letter highlights their concerns with comments made by a member of the Assembly regarding the characterization of children helping around the farm as child labour. I believe it's regarding the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I could give a speech, but I know you don't want one.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate that, hon. member. Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. The first is from a constituent, Todd Hartley, an avid outdoorsman and hunter who feels there needs to be a change in legislation regarding leases on Crown land to allow more foot access year-round so that he and other hunters can use it appropriately. I have the letter and would ask the Minister of Environment and SRD to carefully consider it. I know she will. That's the first one.

The second tabling I have is a very lengthy letter from Sherri Case, also a constituent of mine. She wants to see major reforms in the maintenance enforcement program to better protect the interests of children, and she's outlined several very thoughtful and specific proposals on how to do so. I would ask the Minister of Human Services and the Justice minister to have a thorough read of it. I think it's a very good read – great ideas from Sherri here – and I have the needed copies.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the letter I just read from in my member's statement, a letter dated March 14 to the Hon. Alison Redford, Premier of Alberta, and the hon. Alberta cabinet ministers.

The Deputy Speaker: Please, hon. member, we don't use proper names.

The hon. associate minister responsible for PDD.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] In follow-up to yesterday's discussion about the Workers' Compensation Board in this Chamber I'm pleased to table some statistics on the number of inquiries that they've had in the last 10 years for the consideration of the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View and other members there, who, obviously, aren't interested in the tabling.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. associate minister.

Hon. members, the Member for Airdrie rose on a point of order at 1:55. Hon. Member for Airdrie, if you'd like to speak to your point of order and the citation, please.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is referring to our *Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta*. There is a section in here, Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) – it's not used often, but we will attempt to here – on making allegations against a member, in particular, imputing false or unavowed motives to another member. Very, very on point in this case. I think that the government would agree that we do not want, obviously, a lot of commotion in this House. We wouldn't want that, especially when we have points that we do agree on. We need to, of course, respect the differences that we have and celebrate those things that we are similar on and not try to razz each other for no reason.

Let me make very clear on behalf of our leader something that she has never wavered from. There's absolutely a complete commitment on her part and on the Wildrose side to decrease carbon emissions that we give off here as a province. There is no doubt about that. We've been very clear about that throughout.

There's no doubt also that there have been instances of miscommunication where there's been a view put forth that the science is somehow unsettled. There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that when you put more CO₂ into the atmosphere, the atmosphere warms up. That science is absolutely settled. So we are completely committed to that and reducing carbon dioxide, our carbon footprint, and want to make sure that on a go-forward that is very clear. Of course, where the science is not settled is how fast it is happening and what best to do to deal with that. That's where researchers are spending millions and millions and millions of dollars in that regard.

That is an explanation of it. We will be very, very, very clear going forward that we want to decrease carbon emissions in this province because it's the right thing to do, and we're going to do it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do believe that there's a place that has frozen over today, and I'm hesitant to go out tonight in case the moon is blue. However, I think it's important for Alberta that the hon. member stood up today and clarified that they do understand that in order for us to sell Alberta products to the world, we have to embrace what the world wants and we have to understand what the market conditions are. I'm pleased that they actually are coming into this modern era and understanding that. There was confusion over that, and there probably will remain confusion because of the way that he equivocated in his remarks.

I'll just go back to the comments that his leader did make on April 16, 2012, in the leaders' debate, quote: we have always said that the science isn't settled, and we need to continue to monitor the debate. On April 19, quote: there is still a debate in the scientific community, and we're going to continue to watch the debate in the scientific community.

So it's an important move forward today. I think an important piece of business was done today when the hon. member dragged his party and his leader kicking and screaming into 2013 to join the rest of us.

3:00

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.

I'm going to make a ruling at this point. I think what we had here, the reference to a comment I believe from the government side – I believe it was to the Deputy Premier – begged for some clarification. It's obvious that the Member for Airdrie got up and, I would say, very eloquently clarified. I would suggest that the House now has no doubt but to accept this position on behalf of himself and his party. So I would say that there's no point or order. Let's move on.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) the legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and this evening for consideration of the main estimates. Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Education in committee room A in the afternoon, and Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Treasury Board and Finance in committee room A this evening.

The House now stands adjourned.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:01 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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