

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 8, 2005** 1:30 p.m.
Date: 05/03/08
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I have a set of introductions today. The first is to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three very special guests seated in the public gallery today. Richard Crier, Anne Locke, and Craig Auger work diligently to raise awareness of aboriginal issues in our province. Richard is from the Samson band in Hobbema. He grew up in an environment of drugs and alcohol, but he has turned his life around and is studying at CDI College to become a computer technician. Anne Locke grew up in foster care. She works hard to spread awareness about specific issues affecting young aboriginals and now works for the Edmonton public school board. Craig Auger uses the power of drumming to increase awareness of aboriginal issues. In fact, last Thursday some of you here may have seen him outside the Legislature Building demonstrating traditional native drumming. That's when I first met him. I'd ask that our honoured guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My other introduction is of a visiting school group, one of the very best and brightest classes not only in Edmonton-Riverview but possibly the entire world. Now, they're from St. Martin Catholic school, and they are students registered in the Ukrainian bilingual program. They're seated in the public gallery, and they're accompanied by their teacher, Natalie Harasymiw. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of all MLAs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this House two distinguished gentlemen sitting in the members' gallery. The first gentleman requires very little introduction to Albertans, and that is Mr. Harley Johnson, who is the Métis settlements ombudsman. Seated next to him is, of course, the Métis settlements adviser to the ombudsman and an investigator, Mr. Chuck McBurney, who is also a constituent of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I would ask that they both rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege today to rise and introduce the Bethal Recycled Teens, a very important group individually and collectively that is represented here today. There are 27 in the audience. I believe they are sitting in the members' gallery, and they are here with their leader, Phylliss Stein. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to introduce to you and through you guests from Edmonton-Mill Woods. We have two grade 6 classes with 45 students from Mary Hanley school along with teachers Steven Bain, Melanie Mazurek, Kim Schellenberg, and parent volunteer Mrs. Colleen Sommerfeld. I'd like to ask these guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the introduction sheet, but I understand that a group from NorQuest is joining us today, so through you and to all members of the Assembly I'd like to introduce a class joining us from NorQuest College. Their instructor, Allan Carlson, has been very good about bringing groups down here, and I'm going to visit this particular group later in April, I think. I'd ask them, if they're in the Assembly, to please rise. There they are, a very inquisitive group and committed to citizenship. I'd ask you all to please welcome them to the Assembly.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly two people sitting in the gallery. They are Mr. Bill Irons and Mrs. Eileen Irons. They are my best friends. I request them to please rise and receive the welcome from the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. First, I am more than happy to stand and introduce to you and through you on the occasion of International Women's Day four women who are very important to me: my wife of 13 years, Somboon Eggen, whose love and support means everything to me; as well, I would literally not be here if not for my next guest, my mother, Marion Eggen, who has always gone above and beyond the call of duty to assist me in all of my endeavours.

An Hon. Member: She had to.

Mr. Eggen: She had to, yeah.

And, finally, Louise Barr, a tireless volunteer and supporter and my auntie; also, a woman who keeps me all together in my constituency office, my constituency manager, Arlene Chapman. If those ladies could please rise.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, as you know, every member in this Chamber is here because of a very hard-working and dedicated team of volunteers and supporters, who have worked tirelessly to get us to where we are today. My case is no different, and I am very honoured that a group of people I would like to call my secret of success is able to join me here this afternoon. Without the work of these people I wouldn't have the privilege of sitting in this Assembly here today. I would like to call each of their names, and they can rise together and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Mr. Ron and Mary Deeprise; Lance Burns; Gilbert Charest; Sylvia Krogh; Denise Alston; Brent Bartlett with his wife, Paula, his sons Nicholas and Lucas, and his daughter Abigail; Tom Bremner; and Christine Bremner. Please give them the traditional greeting.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a good friend and colleague from the Alberta Alliance Party. Marilyn Burns is a communications vice-president on the provincial council of the Alberta Alliance Party, where her work and dedication has been a great asset. She is indeed a pillar in the party. I'd like to ask our honoured guest, Marilyn Burns, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Calder mentioned that today is International Women's Day, and I have the pleasure of introducing a very powerful and influential woman seated in the public gallery. She is a friend and a neighbour and also happens to be the driving force behind our Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Her name is Rita Agnihotri. I'd like the Assembly to give her the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we call Orders of the Day this afternoon, I will provide a ruling to the House with respect to the question period and the rotation.

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

Government Aircraft

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The use of taxpayer-funded aircraft by this government is scandalous. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why a paid lobbyist for a new rail link to Fort McMurray, Rod Love, was given exclusive use of a government aircraft to fly from Edmonton to Calgary last year just a week before the Premier floated the idea of that rail link publicly?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea. But I'm sure that the Auditor General will be reviewing all aspects of the use of government aircraft by all people, including those from outside government, so I'll await the findings of the Auditor General.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Could the Premier explain why Mr. Love was on a government aircraft to Fort McMurray March 29, 2004, the same day a press conference was held to announce that the province was granting over a million dollars to Mr. Love's client to study the feasibility of a rail link to Fort McMurray?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, no, I can't. I have no knowledge of that particular incident.

An Hon. Member: You should.

Mr. Klein: Across the way someone shouted, "You should." Well, Mr. Speaker, I have responsibility for virtually all of these portfolios and all of the duties of the MLAs, and this is – I don't know – a \$23 billion or \$24 billion or \$25 billion operation. I can't devote my

attention to who might be or might not be on an airplane on a particular day.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier undertake to inform the Assembly how much of that taxpayer grant was paid by the railway lobby group to Mr. Love for his lobbying work?

Mr. Klein: I have no idea, Mr. Speaker, nor is it any of my business. How much a private-sector operation pays a consultant is entirely up to them.

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

Investments in Tobacco Companies

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At the same time the government has been talking wellness and tobacco reduction, it has been taking millions of taxpayer dollars and investing in tobacco companies. According to the most recent listing available for the heritage fund, the Alberta government has invested over \$10 million in some of the world's largest tobacco companies, including Imperial Tobacco, R.J. Reynolds, and Philip Morris. Once again this government says one thing but does something else. My questions are to the Premier. Why has the government been investing millions into getting Albertans hooked on smoking?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the inappropriate preamble, it is the duty and the function of the heritage savings trust fund and all officials associated with that fund to maximize the investments.

I'll have the hon. Minister of Finance respond.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is exactly that. There is a separate investment division. I think it's their responsibility – and I think everyone in this House would agree – to invest those dollars in the heritage fund in manners that bring the greatest return to this province. The minister doesn't generally interfere in that, and in fact I don't think you would approve if we did. As I say, we have a qualified group of investors. I think their track record shows that they do an excellent job of investing that fund, and the returns to the people of this province have been enormous.

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the Premier: given that the Liberal members on the heritage savings trust fund asked and were told by the then minister that ethical investing was not possible because it would increase the risk, which risk is this government more concerned with, the risk to investment or the risk to Albertans' health?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we're cognizant of the need for some kind of antismoking legislation, and indeed that will be introduced. But to relate that somehow to use of the heritage savings trust fund is somewhat confounding.

Mr. Speaker, now I forgot what – she said something.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: will the govern-

ment now do the right thing and pull all taxpayer dollars out of investing in tobacco companies?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, heritage savings trust fund dollars are accumulated mostly from oil and gas revenues.

But I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we've entrusted a group of very knowledgeable and very talented people to manage the investments of the heritage fund. I'm not sure that this House or the people of this province would want us to be micromanaging each and every one of those investments. I'm not sure that that would be the best way to ensure that we get the maximum benefit from those dollars in the fund that are invested.

There is a committee of this Legislature that certainly talks to people around this province on their various trips, talking about the heritage fund. To the best of my knowledge – and I review most of the information that comes back from that – this particular incident has never been raised by the public. I think, Mr. Speaker, there's some scrambling there.

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

Market Surveillance Administrator Review of Enron

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government can no longer ignore the mounting evidence that Enron colluded with Powerex to drive up electricity prices in Alberta. Enron traders joke on tape of going to jail for price-fixing and making Alberta's power market, quote, a gong show. Well, electricity deregulation has certainly been a gong show, and this government is fully responsible. My first question is to the Premier. Why did the government allow Enron to start and then continue to price gouge Alberta electricity consumers?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, this is the subject of an ongoing investigation. The market surveillance administrator has uncovered new information relative to Enron that was not previously available and has asked the federal Competition Bureau to reopen the Enron investigation. I would suggest that all members of this Assembly await the outcome of that investigation.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. The investigation is not sufficient. How many times did the government meet Enron officials regarding the planning of electricity deregulation? How many times did you meet with Enron?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has made a very argumentative statement. I would suggest that he direct that statement to the market surveillance administrator or to the federal Competition Bureau and tell them that their investigation into this matter is not sufficient.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that Enron officials stated in the year 2000, quote, to date the government has been amending documents and rules fairly freely, end of quote, how many documents and how many rules did this government amend on Enron's behalf so they could rip off Albertans?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as Albertans we are all concerned about this new information that has come to light, and if the hon. member has any further information, I would invite him to provide it to the market surveillance administrator or the Competition Bureau. The Minister of Energy assures me that the market surveillance administrator has been diligent in his job as a watchdog on behalf of all Alberta consumers, and as I said he has uncovered new information. That information has been passed on to the federal Competition Bureau with a request to reopen the investigation, and I would ask that he await the outcome of that investigation.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On May 28, 2004, the provincial government made the following promise to Alberta municipalities: "On April 1, 2005, municipalities will no longer fund ground ambulance services and will be able to allocate funds currently dedicated to this service to other municipal priorities." The Conservatives even put this promise in writing. My question is to the Premier. Will this promise, made to Alberta municipalities in May of 2004 on ground ambulance service funding, be just another broken promise of this government?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it's not a broken promise. Basically, the scope of the program changed dramatically, went from \$55 million to \$128 million. We will be proceeding with two discovery projects, one in Palliser and the other in the Peace country. But I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, today we have provided for the municipalities of Alberta funding in the amount of \$55 million to assure, had any of them perceived that they would be vastly inconvenienced by this continued review of the transfer, that they would not be caught short by that. Over and above that we will be providing the two pilots, or discovery projects, as a separate funding chapter. So in total in this coming year the support for ground ambulance in Alberta will be at least \$65 million from this provincial government.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that all evidence is that \$65 million will be significantly inadequate, when will the government be able to tell this House the full cost of transferring ambulance services to the provincial government?

Mr. Klein: That is an interesting question. Mr. Speaker, it was determined through extensive study by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo that \$55 million would be adequate. That figure was audited, as I understand it, and it was deemed to be sufficient. So how that ballooned to \$128 million is somewhat of a mystery, understanding the simplicity of the program and how it was to be undertaken in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister has pointed out, she is doing all she can to remedy the situation as it affects those municipalities that took some steps on the assumption that ambulance services were to be transferred to the regional health authorities.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is not a trained administrator and not responsible for developing programs, why did the Premier take his word for it instead of asking for a proper administrative analysis of this situation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, both members had sufficient support from very talented and very educated and very skilled members of the public service, and it was those people who really compiled much of the information and made detailed examinations of the information to make sure that it was correct.

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

Lynnview Ridge

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that environmental protection is very important and the fact that the pollution cleanup in Lynnview Ridge residential area in the Calgary-Fort constituency has been disputed and delayed for over three years, my question is to the Minister of Environment. Could the minister explain what caused this delay and how it happened?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A few years ago environment protection issued environmental orders. In actual fact, at that time there were many stakeholders that had been party to this important initiative because the protection of our environment and the residents is first and foremost from an environmental ministry's perspective. I can assure the hon. member, though, that as we go forward, there is a mediation process that is taking place as we speak with the multitude of stakeholders in order to arrive at the desired resolution to this important initiative.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is also to the same minister. What measures are taken to ensure that a government environmental cleanup order is carried out when it is issued?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, through our environmental enforcement orders I can assure all members of this House that the mediation is carrying on. Having said that, I want to assure all Albertans that the protection of the environment and the residents pertaining to this issue with all the stakeholders will clearly be covered on this initiative through mediation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. To me it's a matter of wealth and health of my constituents, so when can my constituents in the affected area expect to see some cleanup action?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, if the mediation goes as we anticipate, it is my hope and, shall I say, direction that by the end of this summer the mediation will be carried out and, furthermore, that, again, the environment protection and the residents' safety will be first and foremost towards this important initiative.

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

School Utilization

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School closures threaten the viability and survival of communities as small as Bruderheim to the established communities within Edmonton and Calgary. Meanwhile, the public education stakeholders have for years pointed to serious flaws in the school utilization formulas there. My question is to the minister of infrastructure. Will the minister finally commit to changing the utilization formula to protect such public schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, when the utilization formula was put in, it was put in for a distinct reason. We had a lot of schools that were at the 15 to 20 to 40 per cent utilization. I do believe it is time to evolve this formula, and we are currently looking at different and varied ways that we can evolve it. Hopefully these announcements will be made soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister commit to adopting a community-based utilization formula for urban schools, as has been recommended for rural schools in the government's rural development strategy?

Dr. Oberg: No, Mr. Speaker, because I feel we can get a better formula than that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why has the minister not followed the recommendation of the Learning Commission and moved capital funding for schools back under the education ministry, where it belongs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because that was one recommendation that was turned down by the government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a very related topic, the Edmonton public school board right now is conducting what they refer to as a cluster study, which I am led to believe might result in the closure of some schools. Can the minister explain to us why it is that school boards undertake such studies?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I understand is happening in northeast Edmonton is that the Edmonton public school board is looking at three schools that are relatively close to each other that have occupancies anywhere from one-third to two-thirds full.

What they are looking at doing is taking the whole class, the teacher and everything, and moving them to one of the three schools and potentially two of the three schools. They've anticipated that by doing this, there would be a cost saving of about \$200,000 per year.

So they're taking a look at it. My understanding is that it's going to the Edmonton public school board meeting tonight, and that they will either make decisions on it or they will table it for further discussion, Mr. Speaker.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the anticipated changes in the utilization formula and the results of such cluster studies result in an enhanced ability of school boards to build schools in city sprawl areas such as Castle Downs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, there is an excess of space right around Alberta. If we were to take a complete picture of the amount of school space, there are roughly 100 extra schools. Combine this with a school population that is actually decreasing as opposed to increasing, and we're in a very difficult situation. Compounding this is the fact that the schools are simply not in the right place.

So I do feel that by changes to the formula it will enhance the schools to be put in the right place. It will allow local decision-making by the public school boards, and I think that it will be something that is greeted very positively. Mr. Speaker, I really must stress, though, that we still are working on this formula. I think it's going to be a good formula, but we're currently in the consultative phases with the school boards.

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

Daycare System

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The national daycare program being established by the federal government is meant to help all children. This government first refused to sign any deal and then was not able to work with other provinces to establish an agreement. To the Minister of Children's Services: why is the minister continuing to hold up an arrangement that will give money to parents that require care for their children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really do appreciate the question. I think it's important for the hon. member to understand that when we were at the negotiating tables, at the federal/provincial table, it was important for me as the minister responsible to do what's right for Alberta and to do what's right for Alberta parents, and that is to give the Alberta parents choice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister supports development in the for-profit sector, what plan does the ministry have to avoid abuses of government grants by private companies, like in Australia, where a company can make a profit of \$100,000 per year per daycare?

The Speaker: Well, this is not Australia, hon. minister, but . . .

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member should understand that what Alberta supports is parents' choice. Whether it's for-profit, whether it's nonprofit, whether it's kin care, or whether it's day home, that's what we believe in. We do not have any big Australian daycare or what Minister Dryden refers to as Wal-Mart for-profit daycares. What we do have here are small mom-and-pop daycares. Again, I think it's important for the hon. member to understand that it's about choice, and it's about what's in the best interest of the child.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has not increased daycare subsidies since 2001, what is the plan to aid parents in affording quality daycare if this government cannot come to an agreement with the federal government?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact we did get other provinces onside at the federal/provincial/territorial meeting because they listened to what Alberta had to say. They listened to what was important to Albertans, that it was in the best interest of the child.

I will let the hon. member know that we're cautiously optimistic about closing the deal with the federal minister – again, it's about choice – and then, when we get the money from the federal government, we can make those decisions about raising the subsidy, giving stay-home parents tax incentives. All of those are important. We will continue negotiating the best interests of the parents who live in this province and the best interest of their children.

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

Foreign Workers

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a lot of attention recently on the hiring of foreign workers in some of our large industries and in some construction. In Red Deer we have one very successful food processing plant that is hiring a number of temporary employees from central America, and some of my constituents are concerned about hiring people from other countries. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Are there not enough people here in Alberta and Canada to fill these jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a good question. Thanks to a good government we are blessed here in Alberta with thousands of jobs, and no doubt most jurisdictions in North America would love to have the challenges that we have.

Of course, when it comes to jobs, priority will always be given to qualified Albertans and Canadians first, Mr. Speaker. In addition to that, groups underrepresented in our labour force – aboriginal people, people with developmental disabilities – and other low-income Albertans will also be given the opportunities.

In relation to the foreign worker, Mr. Speaker, employers first of all have to exhaust all avenues in relation to getting local employees in place, and if they can't do that, then they have to apply to the federal government's temporary foreign workers' program. It's a challenging and complicated process and can be costly to the employer, so I'm sure and I have confidence in the employers in

Alberta that every opportunity will be given first to Albertans and Canadians, aboriginal people, and people with disabilities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is your department doing to develop a skill base of Albertans in order to meet the demand for skilled labour?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker, Alberta shines in this area because I believe Alberta trains 25 per cent of all the apprentices in Canada, and that's commendable. The apprenticeship and training industry is vital to Alberta's future economic success in relation to resolving the labour skills shortage. My department alone processes and funds over 4,600 apprentices to go through the program annually. We also spent another \$280 million in that program, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Jablonski: My last question is to the Minister of Economic Development. How many foreign workers have come to Alberta under the provincial nominee program? Do they need English language skills? Does this program displace Alberta workers?

Mr. Dunford: The last part of her question talked about displacing Alberta workers. This can't happen under the program because, as the Minister of Human Resources and Employment had already indicated, any of these kinds of programs are only after the skills that are required are exhausted amongst Albertans and, in fact, Canadians. I would remind the House and you, Mr. Speaker, that Economic Development, Human Resources and Employment, and Advanced Education some time ago released the report called Prepared for Growth, and we talked about the fact that it would be Alberta first, then Canada, then offshore.

But we are going to have to go offshore. People that were listening to the answer previously of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation heard about the decline in numbers of school children, and so when we look ahead and we look at the demographics of what's happening in Alberta, we simply are not going to be able to fill the demand that we are going to be faced with in the future. So we have to work with the federal government. We have to work on the issue of English. Perhaps the standards are too high. We need people. Like the 1920s, Mr. Speaker, we need a full-front initiative in this province at some time to bring these people here.

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

Automobile Insurance Rates

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are paying the highest auto insurance premiums in this province's history while insurance companies rake in record profits. Meanwhile, the Minister of Finance has been sitting on the Automobile Insurance Rate Board report. To the minister: why won't the minister disclose the Automobile Insurance Rate Board report immediately?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly will bring a recommendation forward very soon, but I think if the hon. member is following this – and I'm sure he is – he would understand that the last of the filings of the companies is just in the process of occurring. What we had was preliminary information, what I had from the Automobile Insurance Rate Board after I wrote to them and said: in

view of anticipated high returns, would you please look at this and provide me with a recommendation? The hon. member probably knows that they would do that review in October. What I had asked them to do was to bring that review forward. I have met with the insurance company group. I have asked them their intentions and asked them to come back with what their intentions are in the very short term.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister, then: given that the minister will not release the report today, will the minister provide instant relief to Alberta drivers by at the very least eliminating the 3 per cent hidden sales tax on auto insurance?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, it's not hidden, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there's a 3 per cent tax. It's been there for years and years, and if we did eliminate it, there's no assurance that that savings would go, in fact, to the people who insure their vehicles. There is no tie there. I think what we should concentrate on is exactly what this government has concentrated on, and that is to ensure that people who have to insure their vehicles under PL and PD, which is compulsory insurance in this province, have a reasonable way to do that. This government has done that.

Albertans enjoy some of the lowest insurance rates in the country. I've heard a lot of call for public insurance by the people across the way, and I'm not sure if they want British Columbia insurance here or whether they want some other public insurance. My understanding is that B.C. insurance – public insurance – is in fact much higher. Saskatchewan is lower.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister won't release the report. She won't eliminate the hidden tax. Why doesn't she just do the right thing and institute a lower premium public auto insurance system?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, as I said, Mr. Speaker, really the only people in this province that I've heard calling for public insurance are the Liberal Party and the NDs. The private sector is alive and well in this province. There are 72 companies that insure vehicles. Their agents are in every one of our communities. We want to make sure that people who must insure their vehicles to operate a vehicle in this province have opportunity for insurance that is reasonable and right. We approached it the right way: you drive, you have a good driving record, you have a lower insurance premium. You are a bad driver, you will have a higher insurance premium. We have removed the age and gender from it.

We've had less than a year, in fact about six months, to see these reforms work and, Mr. Speaker, they are working. One thing is that I have not refused to release what the auto rate board sent me. I have said that you must consider it in the fullness of all of the information. In this government we have a responsibility to act on full information, not partial, which is what this hon. member is asking me to do today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Government Air Travel

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In reply to my questions yesterday, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation ac-

knowledge that in addition to the government air fleets the government also does on occasion charter aircraft, including private jets. The minister then committed to making public information about the chartering of these aircraft, including flights on private jets. My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Exactly who popped on these private jets that were chartered to travel across Canada, and how much did it cost the government of Alberta?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, first of all, under FOIP a lot of that information is private, but I certainly will undertake to get as much of the public information as possible to the hon. member. These records are public, and we will get them to him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. If chartering aircraft only takes place occasionally, will the minister then order his officials to compile the necessary information, including cost, frequency, who went where and when, and table it in this Assembly? The FOIP process is very expensive, and it's difficult too.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, consistent with the FOIP Act I'd be more than happy to do that.

Mr. Eggen: Given the minister's admission yesterday that the government has chartered private planes to fly across Canada on up to six different occasions, why didn't the Premier or government ministers use commercial instead of chartered jets?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, each and every time an airplane is chartered or an airplane is utilized, it's for different circumstances. I don't believe that you would want me to stand here and talk about each particular time on the six or seven occasions that were there, but I would certainly undertake to provide the information to the Legislative Assembly that I promised.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Affordable Housing in Fort McMurray

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The unprecedented growth in our provincial economy and the steady stream of new individuals and families coming to our province, not to mention the individuals living in other communities that commute, have led to a significant increase in the need for affordable housing and housing development in high-growth communities. This is especially true in Fort McMurray, where the population has grown almost 20 per cent since 2002 and the growth rate is forecast to be at approximately a hundred thousand in the next 10 to 15 years, the third largest city in Alberta, if I can mention. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What has this minister done to assist those people who cannot afford the market rate rents in high-growth communities such as Fort McMurray?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member indicated, Fort McMurray is a vibrant community, and it is very fast growing. Along with that growth, of course, comes the need for housing, especially in the area of affordable housing.

In Fort McMurray the way that we have assisted is through the

Canada/Alberta affordable housing program, which was established in 2002. It's an excellent program, where we as a provincial government match funding along with the federal government, and I'm pleased to let you know that \$6.7 million has been allocated over the past two years to provide 310 units in Fort McMurray. But more importantly, along with that, Mr. Speaker, through the rent supplement and community housing program we've also provided assistance for another 365 houses.

So, yes, there is a problem in this area, Mr. Speaker, but we are working hard to address it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Given that the availability of serviced lots or land for development is in short supply, can the minister advise what her department has done to address this challenge?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, in keeping with Fort McMurray, not only is it affordable housing that is necessary but also housing in general. What we are working toward, hon. member, is providing land as quickly as possible on the market. Last year we transferred 470 acres from the Social Housing Corporation, and we made that a direct sale to fast-track the development, which worked very, very well. Just two weeks ago we closed a tender on approximately another 400 acres in the area.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the goal – well, it's a philosophy that we've been discussing over the past three months while I've been in the ministry – is to make the land that is available in the Social Housing Corporation available very quickly in total, as a total package, to the community of Fort McMurray. I'm hoping that this will address the situation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Danyluk: With the challenge of the availability in affordable housing at this time my next question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Can the minister advise how he plans to address the influx and the increase of traffic on adjacent transportation routes from communities such as Edmonton, Lac La Biche, St. Paul, Athabasca, specifically highways 63 and 28?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly 63, 28 – you add in 881 – are all parts of our plan in order to help Fort McMurray. I'm currently in the process of sitting down with the oil industry, with the four or five major plants that are in the Fort McMurray region, to come up with a collaborative solution on how we can move forward not just on people transport but also on the transportation of goods and services as that's going to be critical considering that we have some \$80 billion or \$90 billion worth of projects that are in that particular area. We are going to be sitting down, and hopefully a solution will come forward on these.

In the meantime we are proceeding with paving 881, and we are proceeding with improvements on 63, but realistically, Mr. Speaker, through you to the hon. member, I would really like to see these improvements come along quicker than they are at the moment.

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

2:20

SuperNet

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been told for the third time that the completion of the SuperNet is imminent. The latest deadline is now for October 2005, more than a year after the initial deadline. My question is to the hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. If public/private partnerships genuinely transfer risks to the private sector, why has the government refused to use the provisions in the contract that would hold the private-sector partners accountable?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. As the hon. member mentioned, the SuperNet project completion is indeed overdue. I'm pleased to pass along, though, particularly to my rural colleagues, that more than 400 rural communities will be connected to SuperNet by the end of April. A vast majority of these facilities that we're talking about – government buildings, health care buildings, libraries, schools – will be connected to the SuperNet by the end of June, with the total network being completed by the end of September, giving us just one more reason to celebrate our centennial in style with the Alberta SuperNet advantage.

Mr. Elsalhy: To the same minister: given that public agencies have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars installing their own networks because they couldn't wait for the SuperNet, will the minister commit to reimbursing these groups for the cost of the upgrade?

Mr. Ouellette: No, Mr. Speaker, we won't.

Mr. Elsalhy: To the same minister then: can you assure municipalities, school boards, and other public agencies that they will have the funding necessary to maintain access to the SuperNet?

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I think that they will have the funding available, and we're working on all of that right now.
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Canadian Forest Products Ltd. Mill Closure

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Canfor in the MD of Clear Hills near Hines Creek has served notice that they will close their mill this summer and consolidate their operations in Grande Prairie. This will result in the loss of over a hundred jobs in some of my communities, increase log truck traffic on our highways and the Dunvegan bridge, loss of municipal tax revenue, and again the movement of our raw resources to the south. Furthermore, this decision will no doubt affect other mills in the area that have had joint agreements with the Hines Creek Canadian Forest Products Ltd. mill. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is the minister doing to minimize the impact of this pending closure on all those affected, including the possibility of probably retaining some of this timber in our local community?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Coming

from a small community myself, this is a very grave concern and something that I had empathy for when we visited that community. It is important to note that this was not a government decision but a company decision, and it was strictly based on business. To remain competitive in the global marketplace, companies today are finding that they have to make decisions to consolidate their mills and to find efficiencies.

When I first learned about this closure, at the request of the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace we made the attempt to go up and meet with the four affected communities. I have to say that I appreciated their concerns, and we listened to them express their concern about transportation and safety, questions about jobs and the viability of their community, schools, and residents, and concerns about their future in terms of economic development.

I've spoken with my colleagues from Economic Development and Infrastructure and, as well, Human Resources and Employment about the future of these communities, and I know Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development have talked to them as well. We'll continue to work with the company to look for employment opportunities as they have promised. As well, timber allocations for the future are being reviewed by our department for the future of that community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Given that a potential of 10,000 truckloads will travel on highway 2 and over the Dunvegan bridge crossing the Peace, what is being done to assure the safety of all drivers using this road and bridge?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Dunvegan bridge poses a considerable problem when it comes to logging trucks coming down the hill. What is occurring right now is there is a significant turn just prior to the bridge, and the logging trucks are going to have a difficult time manoeuvring that turn. When you add into the facts some of the road maintenance issues that we have experienced on the Dunvegan bridge, we really have to take a very serious look at how we can alter the route onto that bridge. Through you to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, we are currently looking at and studying that, and we will very soon be coming up with a solution to how we can help these logging trucks on the Dunvegan bridge.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Economic Development. What is his ministry doing to minimize the negative economic impact this decision has in my constituency, including the impact on many small businesses that benefit from the spinoff economy?

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, we have one of our regional economic development alliances in place in the Peace region, and we also have an office in Grande Prairie. With the staff and the people that are involved in the alliance, we've been trying to deal with this matter in the same way which we do in other communities, and that's to start looking at then: what other economic development opportunities will there be? We look into things like tourism. We look into value-adding in terms of the industries that might be up there. But again, hon. member, within the context of economic

development where we're catalysts and not bankers, we'll continue to do our work, providing the kind of information, working with the people in the area to try to get the stimulation that they're going to need moving on into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that discussions have resumed regarding a potential negotiated solution to the current Canada/United States lumber dispute. My question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can he kindly update this House on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Canada has been developing an outline of a potential agreement in consultation with provincial governments and industry in hope of presenting to the United States some form of a beginning of a consultation and try and deal with this ongoing softwood lumber issue for years. In developing the proposal from the province of Alberta, it is the responsibility of the minister of sustainable resources to contact industry and build that recommendation, which then we will forward to other provincial governments and to the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first and only supplementary question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who is responsible for forest management in this province. Can the minister advise the House what the current status of discussions with other provinces and the industry is now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said in this House last week, we will work effectively and diligently with the provinces of Canada and the federal government and consult regularly to discuss how we can move forward with this very sensitive softwood lumber issue. Through these discussions we are committed with the federal government to a pan-Canadian approach, and we're working to develop the agreement for that pan-Canadian approach. We think that there's some good common ground so that we can restart these negotiations.

As I also committed to last week, we will continue to work with our industry, with our Softwood Lumber Trade Council, and our close colleagues at International and Intergovernmental Relations to make sure that we come through to a successful conclusion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

2:30

Métis Hunting Rights

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. There's been much talk and much concern over the potential impacts of the interim Métis harvesting agreement on the sustainability of our wildlife resources. Can the minister inform this House as to the instruments we have available to ensure hunting sustainability in the province of Alberta while respecting aboriginal rights?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, our role, as with all hunting, all trapping, and all fishing, is to ensure that there's proper monitoring, proper enforcement, and proper management of the resources. We already have in place in Alberta a process to register species that are of management concern and of management concern to all Albertans. These registries enable us to monitor the harvest that is occurring and make decisions about that harvest and how it affects the resource that is being hunted. Where necessary we can and we do establish closures for conservation purposes, and it's important that we recognize that we do this now in our key wildlife corridors.

The agreement that the hon. member is talking about respects closures. It also imposes limits for conservation purposes, and that's the key of the entire agreement. As with all hunting and fishing laws and regulations, Mr. Speaker, if there is a violation, we are committed to the enforcement practices that have been put together in this province to protect all resources.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Further to the same minister: could he specifically address the issue of fisheries and what the province can do to ensure the sustainability of sport fishing in Alberta?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, we have many management methods to ensure that sport fishing is sustainable, again, for all Albertans. We know that sport fishing is affected by domestic fishing, and where there are conservation concerns, we have to close lakes when appropriate. The agreement respects these closures. We require all domestic fishing activity, including Métis fishing, to be licensed so that we know where this is taking place and we can manage the lakes effectively. This is part of our monitoring responsibility, and we will continue to do that under this agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister. A supplemental to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: can the minister inform the House as to whether or not the Métis community is supportive of conservation measures, and will such measures guide future negotiations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say at the outset that the agreements balance the need to respect Métis rights but also ensure that we protect Alberta's precious wildlife resource. On the issue of the Métis, Alberta's Métis community has been very supportive and continues to be very supportive of any measures regarding conservation and safety. On that note, as a matter of fact, the Métis waited a full year before they began to harvest anything, and we wanted to make sure that we had the structures in place in order for us to address those very concerns that they had. They wanted to ensure that they knew who could hunt, where they could hunt, and when they could hunt, and it was with that in mind that we brought it forward.

In terms of the interim agreement, Mr. Speaker, what we want to do is monitor what goes on to be able to take into consideration all the issues that will come forward, and then we can go towards the finalization of the final agreement.

The Speaker: Hon. members, thank you very much for your co-operation today. All 16 members who advised the chair that they

wanted to raise a question were able to raise a question. So in the last three days it's been 14, 17, 16, which is very good.

head:

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Statements

The Speaker: I indicated several days ago that before the end of today I would provide the ruling with respect to the operation of question period for the 26th Legislature, and I'm prepared to do that now.

The chair wants to thank all honourable members who participated in the discussion Monday afternoon about what should be the proper rotation of questions for Oral Question Period. As most members noted in their submissions, question period is of fundamental importance to our parliamentary system of government. The chair recognizes the gravity of this matter and has carefully weighed the various submissions against the history and traditions of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

In those submissions some members encouraged the chair to apply the rules that existed for the 21st Legislature, which commenced in 1986. As the chair noted yesterday at page 58 of *Hansard*, there were many differences in 1986 with respect to the operation of question period. At that time a person asking a question was entitled to three supplementaries, and then anyone could ask another supplementary. So there were four supplementaries to every question, and one of those rotated among the parties. That practice ended in 1989, and the chair has no intention of reviving it.

There were arguments advanced about moving the New Democrats up in the order of questions. The chair would note that while the New Democrats have doubled the size of their caucus, they are still one-quarter the size of the Official Opposition. After the 2001 election they had two members to the Official Opposition's seven members, which was a little more than a quarter, but retained the fourth position in the question period.

The Official Opposition has had the first three questions since the 1993 election, when they had 32 seats. Of course, there was no other opposition party until 1997, when the New Democrats elected two members. They had the fourth question then, as they did in 2001.

In their presentations members referred to practices in other jurisdictions across Canada. While this chair has always welcomed advice on procedures in other jurisdictions, it is fair to say that after 99 years of being a province, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta has developed its own practices and traditions, which we can draw upon. As the chair has noted, the practice across Canada with respect to question periods varies widely, with the length running from 15 minutes to one hour.

In the final analysis, the chair sees little reason to depart substantially from the rotation that applied for the previous Legislature and the Legislature before that. For this Legislature, like in the 25th Legislature, the Official Opposition will be entitled to ask the first three main questions. The New Democrat opposition will be entitled to the fourth question each day. On three out of four days a member of the government caucus will be entitled to the fifth question. On those days the Official Opposition will be entitled to the sixth, eighth, and 10th questions, and private members of the government caucus will be recognized for the seventh and the ninth questions. The New Democrat opposition will be entitled to the 11th question every day. A member from the government caucus will have the 12th and the 14th questions. The Official Opposition will have the 13th question.

The chair was gratified that those participating in yesterday's discussion generally endorsed the 45-second rule for questions and answers that the chair put forward on Thursday, March 3. The chair

believes that this time limit will result in more questions in the question period. Members reviewing the chair's ruling of April 11, 2001, will note that in the last Legislature government members were entitled to the 14th and subsequent questions every day. In light of the 45-second guideline it is entirely conceivable that there may be more questions asked each day than in the previous Legislature.

In recognition of the greater number of seats held by the Official Opposition, they will be entitled to the 15th and 17th questions on three out of four days. The government will be entitled to the 16th question. In recognition of the increase in seats by the New Democrats, a member of that caucus will be entitled to the 18th question.

The chair indicated that this is the rotation that would apply on three out of four days. The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, who is the sole representative of the Alliance Party in this Assembly, must be entitled to ask questions in this Assembly. While he is one of 58 private members, allotting the 58th question to him would seem to invite logistics problems. For instance, should the member displace the Leader of the Official Opposition if his turn corresponded with the first question on a given day? While the chair takes very seriously the role of protecting the interests of the minority, he also wants to ensure the orderly progression of the business of the Assembly. Accordingly, the chair finds that the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner will be entitled to the fifth question of the day every four days.

On those days the sixth, eighth, and 10th questions will go to government members, the Official Opposition will be entitled to the seventh and the ninth questions, the New Democrat opposition will have the 11th question, the Official Opposition will have the 12th, 14th, and 16th questions, government members will have the 13th, 15th, and 17th questions, and the New Democrat opposition will have the 18th question.

Hon. members, this rotation means that on most days, assuming 17 questions, the Official Opposition would have nine questions, government members six, and the New Democrats two. Every fourth day the Official Opposition would have eight questions, government members six, New Democrats two, and the Alliance member one. If there were 15 questions asked a day, on most days the Official Opposition would have eight, government members five, and New Democrats two. On the fourth day the Official Opposition would have seven questions, government members five, the New Democrats two, and the Alliance member one. If there were only 13 questions asked a day, then most days the Official Opposition would have seven, government members four, and the New Democrats two. On the fourth day Official Opposition members would have one fewer question, and the Alliance member one.

2:40

In approximate percentage terms, whether there were 13, 15, or 17 questions asked a day for a week, the Official Opposition would have just over 50 per cent of the questions, government members between 30 and 35 per cent, New Democrats between 12 and 15 per cent, and the Alliance member between 1.5 and 2 per cent.

The chair has, as members know, made sure that copious statistics were kept on the time allocated to the different parties within the Assembly. Based on the time spent on questions and answers in the four sessions of the 25th Legislature, with a similar rotation, the Official Opposition's questions and responses accounted for between 48.4 and 53.7 per cent of the time spent. Government members' questions accounted for between 28 and 34 per cent, and the New Democrats, between approximately 17 and 18 per cent.

The chair has been advised that there may be an agreement between the House leaders about replacing the items of business

Members' Statements and Recognitions with an item called statements. However, until the appropriate changes are made to the Standing Orders, the chair will apply the rules that exist for Members' Statements and Recognitions. Based on the standings in the Assembly, for Recognitions over a four-week period government members would be entitled to 35, the Official Opposition 16, the New Democrats four, and the Alliance member one. To remind members, seven members may make a one-minute statement of recognition or congratulation every Monday and Wednesday.

With respect to Members' Statements, over a seven-week period government members will have 35, the Official Opposition 16, the New Democrats four, and the Alliance member one. Members' statements are two minutes in length, and there are four such statements every Tuesday and Thursday.

So starting tomorrow, Wednesday, March 9, 2005, the members of the government caucus will be entitled to four recognitions, the Official Opposition two, and the New Democrats one. Rather than take any more time, the chair will ask the Clerk's office to contact the caucuses with respect to who will be entitled to how many members' statements and recognitions on any given day in the future.

In conclusion, the chair wishes to emphasize that the general rules for question period noted last Thursday will continue; namely, a short preamble to main questions and no preamble to supplementary questions. The practice of providing a list to the Speaker's office of members who wish to ask questions will continue. Of course, should circumstances change, the chair will revisit this allocation of questions. This ruling will take effect Wednesday, March 9, 2005. March 9 will be day 1 for the implementation of this ruling.

Thank you very much.

Hon. members, 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of four members to participate, but in the interim might we revert to Introduction of Visitors?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce a proud Albertan who is here today to watch his father in action, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. This young man is seated in the members' gallery. I'd like to ask Wayne Prins to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a great group of students from Trinity Christian school. They have with them their teacher Mr. George Graffunder and parent helpers Mrs. Linda Neal, Mrs. Judy Kolk, Mrs. Brenda Graham, Mrs. Shelley Biggs, Ms Sylvia Lopez, and Ms Colleen Reimer. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

head: **Members' Statements**
World Schools Debating Championship

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

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to talk about the World Schools Debating Championship that was held in Calgary from February 9 to the 18th. The brightest of high school students from 31 countries around the world debated for the world championship. Calgary's students acted as ambassadors, timekeepers, and hosts. In addition to debating, the international teams travelled to Banff, skied and snowboarded at the Canada Olympic Park, attended a Calgary Hitmen hockey game, and spent a day debating at the Siksika and Tsuu T'ina nations. The grand finale was held at the Hyatt Hotel, downtown Calgary.

I want to recognize the organizing committee members: Ron Lee, David Tupper, Norman Leach, Ken Goosen, and Brad Copas. They did a fantastic job four years ago to successfully bid for the prestigious world event, bringing it to Calgary as part of Alberta's centennial celebration.

I was very pleased to support this event since the beginning and to join the members for Calgary-Lougheed and Calgary-North Hill at the closing ceremony. I also want to thank the Minister of Education and the Minister of Gaming for some matching funds for the event.

The first World Schools Debating Championship was held in Australia in 1988. At that first-ever event Canada's team won the championship and was named the best in the world. The Canadian team was made up entirely of Albertan students. Since that premiere year the competition has grown to over 50 participant countries. Canada has been frequently represented in the top eight finalists, and, notably, Albertan students have been in the national team ever since 1988.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Deaths of RCMP Officers

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The national tragedy which took the lives of four young RCMP constables last week has left Albertans and, indeed, the entire country shocked and appalled. This incident brings the number of police officers slain in our province to 88.

These men were members of families who loved them and communities who respected them. They were members of a brotherhood of firefighters, paramedics, and police officers who depend on each other and trust each other with their lives every day. The families of these officers, the communities who knew them, and the brotherhood to which they belonged are now in a period of deep mourning. I would ask that all Albertans and all Canadians respect the grieving process that is necessary for those left behind.

Mr. Speaker, there are some who are attempting to make this a political issue, and to them I ask this: please honour the memory of these four constables by giving those who knew and loved them the time needed to heal. There's been a fatality inquiry called, and this process will bring out the details surrounding this senseless loss of life. There's no need to aggravate the situation during this initial period of mourning.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Solicitor General for the kindness, the understanding, and the compassion he has shown to the communities in which I live. His thoughtfulness and words of strength have helped us through this difficult time. In closing, I remind all members that the government has set up books of condolence in the rotunda. I invite all of my colleagues to show their support for the families at this time.

Thank you.

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

International Women's Day

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is International Women's Day, a day to celebrate women's achievements and, for those of us that are activist, to continue to advocate for needed change.

The Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women recently issued a resolution to declare the next decade, 2005 to 2015, a decade of difference for aboriginal women in Canada. Mr. Speaker, aboriginal women were the last group to receive the franchise to vote, and they continue to struggle mightily to be safe, healthy, and to have their voices heard. These women face intolerable levels of violence, and addictions, chronic health problems like diabetes, and bone-crushing poverty also impair their ability to share equally in the life of this province. The institute's resolution asks for a coordinated, dedicated community approach to bringing about positive change.

The issue of violence against women continues to hold many other women back from full participation. We need to provide full, predictable, long-term funding for women's shelters. Please fund enough for shelter staff to be paid at fair market value and to have their salaries indexed as MLA salaries are. More concrete support for traditional housing is also a must.

2:50

Finally, I continue to press the government to find a way to fully fund the operations of sexual assault centres in Alberta. Not the piecemeal, project-by-project, narrowly focused method used to date but actually fund the operations of these centres, please.

On this International Women's Day who will step up to the plate in defence of women? Political will and a champion are needed on the government side. Please step forward.

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

International Women's Day

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise today to recognize International Women's Day as we celebrate and recognize the many achievements of women in Alberta and around the world.

This year's Canadian theme is You are Here: Women, Canada and the World. It encourages Canadians to recognize women's accomplishments and to consider the road ahead. International Women's Day is a celebration of Alberta and Canada's women. Combined with our centennial, these two events give Albertans a special opportunity to recognize the women in their lives and the contributions they make to our province and to Canada.

Women in Alberta have made great strides towards different things. They can be proud of their accomplishments in the past hundred years. Women's educational levels have vastly increased, and they've found many successes in nontraditional careers.

Mr. Speaker, for just a moment I'd like to speak about a special woman in my life that had what I'll call a traditional career: my mother. She didn't have national standards or rules to help teach her how to teach her children or any formal training. But she loved us, and she taught us to be honest, to work hard, and to help those around us, and I value the input that she had in my life.

Since 1977, when the United Nations established March 8 as International Women's Day, we have dedicated this day to address the advancement of women's issues and to assess the challenges facing women and to consider future steps to enhance the status of women and to celebrate gains made.

I ask all Albertans to join the Minister of Community Develop-

ment and myself in acknowledging the achievement of women in Alberta and around the globe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed, just to advise hon members that there are other days in March or weeks in March that may be of significance for all hon. members. March 4 to March 25 is the Easter Seal paper egg campaign. March 4 to March 20 is Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. March 6 to March 12 is International Women's Week. March 6 to March 12 is National Dental Assistants Recognition Week. March 7 to March 13 is Pharmacists Awareness Week. March 8, of course, is International Women's Day. March 8 is also the United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace. March 9 to March 16 is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. March 13 is Great Kids awards day. March 14 is Commonwealth Day. March 14 to March 20 is National Farm Safety Week. March 14 to March 20 is Brain Awareness Week. March 15 to March 19 is daffodil days week on behalf of the Canadian Cancer Society. March 17 is St. Patrick's Day. March 19 is St. Joseph's Day. March 20 is Journée internationale de la Francophonie. March 20 is Palm Sunday. March 21 to 28 is the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination. March 21 is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. March 21 is also World Poetry Day. March 22 is World Day for Water. March 23 is World Meteorological Day. March 24 is World Tuberculosis Day. March 25 is Good Friday. March 27 is Easter Day. March 27 is World Theatre Day. March 28 is Easter Monday.

head:

Introduction of Bills

Bill 8

Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2005

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2005.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 8 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Bill 9

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 9, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005, for first reading.

Last year the government passed the Post-secondary Learning Act to help provide a legislative framework for Alberta's vision for an adult learning system that's accessible, flexible, and responsive regardless of where a student chooses to live. Bill 9 proposes minor amendments and housekeeping to fine-tune the legislation and further strengthen it. Some of those changes are for clarity, some are housekeeping, and some delete unnecessary sections.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Bill 10

Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2005

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 10, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2005.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 10 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 12

Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2005

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2005.

This bill updates principles that apply to the treatment of victims. These principles have been agreed to by all provinces, territories, and the federal government.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 12 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Bill 13

Railway (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2005

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Railway (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2005.

These are a couple of very minor amendments that set a time limit for appeals to the Alberta Transportation Safety Board and ensure that there is consistency in dispute resolution mechanisms for existing road/rail crossings.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a statement I have released today on behalf of the NDP opposition to recognize and celebrate International Women's Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a tabling pursuant to the question asked today by the leader of the NDP opposition. The

document is one that's been released by the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, documenting the province's commitment to taking over ground ambulance services.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail from Enron officials in regard to their activities in Alberta, and in it is a quote I took for question period today. I would encourage all members of this Assembly to read it.

The second tabling I have is again in regard to this matter of Enron and their activities in Alberta. This is entitled Project Stanley: Summary of Transactions. Again I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to have a squint through this in their spare time.

Thank you.

3:00

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a copy of the resolution I referred in my member's statement from the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women.

The second tabling is a detailed list of investments from the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and they're detailing the investment in tobacco companies. Mr. Speaker, there are eight tobacco companies involved in 10 separate investments totalling almost 10 and a half million dollars.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from my office to the hon. Minister of Finance requesting a copy of the Automobile Insurance Rate Board review, which she had asked for.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table in the House five copies of the Speaker's ruling on the operation of question period for the 26th Legislature.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. Pursuant to the Government Accountability Act, Government of Alberta 2003-2004 annual report.

Pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Government Accountability Act: the 2003-2004 annual report of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development; the Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development annual report 2003-2004; Alberta Children's Services annual report 2003-2004; Community Development annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2004; Alberta Economic Development 2003-2004 annual report; Alberta Ministry of Energy 2003-2004 annual report; Ministry of Environment 2003-2004 annual report; Executive Council annual report 2003-2004; Alberta Finance 2003-2004 annual report; Alberta Gaming 2003-2004 annual report; Alberta Government Services annual report 2003-2004; Alberta Ministry of Health and Wellness annual report 2003-2004, sections I and II; Human Resources and Employment ministry

annual report 2003-2004; Alberta Infrastructure annual report 2003-2004; Alberta Transportation annual report 2003-2004; Ministry of Innovation and Science annual report 2003-2004, which includes the Alberta Science and Research Authority, Alberta Informatics Circle of Research Excellence, Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research; Government of Alberta Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations 31st Annual Report for the fiscal year April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004; Alberta Justice annual report 2003-2004; Alberta Learning annual report 2003-2004; Alberta Municipal Affairs 2003-2004 annual report; Alberta Revenue annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2004; Alberta Seniors 2003-2004 annual report; Alberta Solicitor General annual report 2003-2004; Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development annual report 2003-2004.

Pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Conflicts of Interest Act: report of selected payments to Members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for the year ended March 31, 2004; report entitled General Revenue Fund, details of grants, supplies and services, capital assets and other, by payee for the year ended March 31, 2004.

Pursuant to the Agriculture Financial Services Act, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation annual report 2003-2004.

Pursuant to the Alberta Capital Finance Authority Act, the Alberta Capital Finance Authority 2004 annual report.

Pursuant to the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act, the 2004 Alberta heritage savings trust fund annual report for the year ended March 31, 2004.

Pursuant to the Insurance Act, the Alberta Automobile Insurance Board annual report for the year ended December 31, 2003.

Pursuant to the Government Accountability Act: Budget 2004, 2004-2005 quarterly budget report, quarter 1 fiscal update; Budget 2004, 2004-2005 activity report, quarter 1 activity report; Budget 2004, 2004-2005 quarterly budget report, quarter 2 fiscal update; Budget 2004, 2004-2005 activity report, quarter 2 activity report.

Pursuant to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act: Members of the Legislative Assembly pension plan annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2001; report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2002; report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2003; and report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2004; Minister of Finance, Alberta Treasury Branches financial annual report 2004; Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation 2003 annual report; provincial judges and masters in chambers pension plan annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2001; the same report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2002; the same report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2003; the first quarter update, 2004-2005, the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, for the three months ended June 30, 2005; the 2004-2005 second quarter update of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund for the six months ended September 30, 2004.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of

the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2005, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving a number of motions relevant to the supplementary estimates, I wish to advise that I provided the government's 2004-05 quarterly budget report for the third quarter to all MLAs on February 28. On this same day I also made this report public, as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act.

Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the 2004-05 supplementary estimates. These supplementary estimates will provide additional spending authority to the office of the Chief Electoral Officer and 20 departments of government. When an election is called, a special warrant can provide interim funding authority. The Assembly will be asked to approve the supplementary estimates and thus ratify this special warrant. When passed, these estimates will authorize increases of \$1,944,494,000 in voted operating expense and equipment inventory purchases, \$102,351,000 in voted capital investment, and \$40 million in lottery fund payments.

Mr. Speaker, I am now tabling the quarterly budget report for the third quarter pursuant to section 9 of the Government Accountability Act. This amended fiscal plan is also required by section 8 of the Government Accountability Act when a second set of estimates is tabled.

I am also tabling the third-quarter activity report describing the major achievements of our government during that period.

Likewise, I am tabling the third-quarter update for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, would you like to move Motion 8?

8. Mrs. McClellan moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2004-05 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion.

The hon. Minister of Finance to conclude debate, or should we just call the question?

Mrs. McClellan: Question.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

9. Mrs. McClellan moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2004-05 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund shall be two days.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

head: **3:10 Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Lukaszuk moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative

Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 7: Mr. Stevens]

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be given this opportunity to address this Assembly as the representative of the Edmonton-Calder constituency. Calder is a place where I have worked very hard during these past years, and I am both humbled and honoured to serve the people of Edmonton-Calder as a member of this Assembly.

Edmonton-Calder is a large urban constituency that straddles the northwest side of the city from 97th Street on the east all the way over to 232nd Street on the west. Calder is an important and historic constituency, with its communities forming part of the heartland of Edmonton north of the river. People in Edmonton-Calder work hard for their money and take a great deal of pride in their communities, people like Kevan and Una Warner, who have lead the charge to save their neighbourhood schools in Wellington and Athlone – and that motion is before the board of Edmonton public tonight – or Karen and Olga at the community drop-in centre, who devote hundreds of volunteer hours to make Calder one of the most vibrant and successful community centres in the province. I think of Bryan Stokes in Prince Rupert, who worked hard to keep the grounds of his apartment building looking good and his condo association firing on all cylinders.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Edmonton-Calder have sent me to this Chamber to look after their interests, to get the political machinery of this province back to working for them rather than the other way around. They have asked me to take action on their energy bills, their car insurance, their schools, and their medical care. They have asked me to make sure that those less fortunate are given the means to live in a dignified and healthy manner. The people of Edmonton-Calder and Alberta speak loud and clear that they do not want their physical environments to be compromised and that there must be reassurances that the lands, the air, the water, and the natural bounties of this province will be there for their children and for generations to come.

The critical portfolio areas for which I am responsible are grouped together for a very specific reason: to build new energy for this province on the strength of a balanced relationship with our environment. Energy is the economic and physical lifeblood of this province, and it will lead the way to change the way that we do things here in this province. This change can be a great economic stimulus for diversification and to build a more equitable society for all Albertans to enjoy.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I've heard someone say that to be born in Alberta was like winning the lottery. Well, maybe that's true for a fortunate few, but for many Albertans there are plenty of disturbing and difficult issues to resolve. The insistent, grinding poverty that thousands of Albertans must live under is no sweepstakes winner. The dark pit of indignation and hopelessness into which so many of our injured workers fall is no scratch-and-win prize. In this brave new Alberta we have created this past 30 years, children born into poverty are likely to stay right where they are: in poverty. More seniors than ever are likely to descend below the poverty line after they retire, and Alberta workers must work longer hours and with less purchasing power than they did back in the 1970s.

For certain, money that flows from oil and gas revenues and booming construction drives a remarkable economy in our province, but just where does all of that money flow to? How we look after the people who are most in need in our society is a measure of our strength as a people. Most Albertans are only one accident or a health problem, a series of unfortunate events, or a few missed paycheques away from themselves living, too, in poverty. We have the ways and means to eliminate poverty in Alberta, and there is no economic, logical, or moral excuse that should keep us from accomplishing this task.

In this new Alberta century people are looking for ways to get our natural advantages working for us, for all of us. We have a strong economy, the wealth of natural resources, the people, the money, and the space to build something remarkable, something to be proud of. What we are lacking, I believe, is a firm commitment to a set of guiding principles that can make these natural endowments work for us to make the best possible life for every single Albertan in this province now and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest a list of guiding principles something like this. Number one, "higher education shall be equally accessible to all" on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means and, in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education. I took that quote from the UN charter of rights and freedoms. Postsecondary education is the way that people can get a leg up and improve themselves economically, intellectually, and spiritually. A good education makes everything better. Let's look past endowment plans and elitist models and make sure that everyone has a real chance to improve themselves through education.

Number two, the right to work at a job with humane conditions, with sufficient hours, pay, and benefits to earn a living; the right to enjoy some rest, leisure, and reasonable and periodic holidays with pay. We might pride ourselves here as the hardest working province in Confederation, but for many people that means that they are being worked to death. Now is the time that we can put into place labour laws that lay out reasonable parameters for work, pay, and benefits.

Number three, let's bring democracy back to the people of Alberta. People in this province used to vote a lot more than they do now because they believed that the system was working for them then. Now, as I have said before, it's more like the opposite is true. The disconnect between what people want and what people get out of government is wider and deeper than the deepest stretch of the Peace River Valley these days.

Proportional representation would help. Rules to limit campaign spending would be a good idea. Giving back the power to school boards and the right to elect health board authority trustees would be useful too. But more than this, people in Alberta will come back to vote and care about politics when the system starts to work for them again, when the provincial government starts charging decent oil and gas royalty rates and puts the money back into the hands of the people that it belongs to, when the government begins to fund public education and health care the way it should, when government starts to protect our health and the health of the natural environment on which we most vitally depend.

Everyone knows that we are on an unsustainable path in regard to our natural worlds. It's becoming patently obvious that we cannot continue to exploit the land, the water, and the air as we have been accustomed. So why don't we turn a corner when we still have that option? We won't lose money by employing measures to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We will gain diversity and strength in our economy, we will lessen our dependence on increasingly expensive traditional fuels, and we will gain a measure of peace of mind knowing that we are finally doing something about a problem that we all know is not getting any better as time goes by.

There are innumerable other benefits to taking action on our dependence on carbon-based fuels. Our health will improve as pollution from gasoline, diesel, and coal is reduced. Cities will grow to accommodate more rapid transit and pedestrian streetscapes. New economies based on conservation and alternative energy production will help to strengthen and diversify our economy.

The oil and gas industry will be with us for a long time to come. It is our ace in the hole, an insurance policy we all hold together that will help to underwrite this new Alberta century. But let's start looking at it for what it truly is: an industry in transition with an uncertain and, ultimately, unsustainable future. What it can do, however, is help to underwrite the transition to the future, a future where every Albertan can count on a decent living and be proud of the choices we make together as a democracy for now and for the future of this fine province that we live in.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, environmentalism is not just about blue boxes and fluorescent light bulbs. It's about how we value the physical world in which we live as an extension of ourselves. Drilling sour gas wells in urban areas is not just a human tragedy waiting to happen; it is also an assault on the sensibilities that we have as human beings, on how we value the places where we live, and on how we value ourselves and each other. Big box store clusters and the blights of billboards on our main drags, Macleod Trail and Gateway Boulevard and Gaetz Avenue, don't just kill pedestrian-friendly main streets and cause traffic problems; they are an attack on how citizens interact with each other and their city. We can do better, and we will.

In this new Alberta century let us remind ourselves about something important. The oil and the gas and the coal and everything beneath our feet is ours. We own it, the people of Alberta, not the energy companies, who seem so bent to extract every last drop as fast as they possibly can. The cities and the countryside are ours, too, as are the schools, the roads, the hospitals, the water that flows around us, the air that we breathe. It's time we stand up and say how we want to use these assets in the best possible way for everyone in this province. It's time, in this new Alberta century, that we choose a more equitable path for our future.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak, and I look forward to working with this Legislature to effect positive change for the people of Alberta. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29 if anyone wishes to ask a question, they may do so now.

There being none, the chair recognizes the Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this Chamber in my maiden speech. I would like to begin by recognizing my predecessor, Don Tannas. His contributions to the communities in the Highwood constituency and his representation of his constituents earned him the trust and respect of the area for 16 years as an MLA. It was only upon his announced retirement that I considered running, and he has left some pretty big shoes to fill. His hard work, determination, and tenacity at representing Highwood will be missed both here and in the constituency. I wish him the best in his future endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency of Highwood is one that has been greatly changed since this Assembly last sat. The amazing population growth that our province has witnessed did not bypass any constituency, and this resulted in the borders of Highwood being greatly altered. Some parts of the new area now constitute Foothills-Rocky View, some are now part of Livingstone-Macleod, and others

now call the offices of Banff-Cochrane to speak with their MLA. I know that Albertans in these areas will be well represented by the MLAs in these areas.

Mr. Speaker, I have called this constituency home for all of my life. In fact, my parents emigrated to this province and to the Highwood area in the early part of the century. My father's brothers had come to Alberta from Holland in 1926. After a time in this province they had written home of their successes and invited others from their family to come over as well. My parents decided to emigrate in 1929 and started the long journey to Alberta, first by boat and then by train across this huge country. Travelling with three small children was no picnic, but the trip, so I am told, went surprisingly well, uneventful all the way to Calgary.

However, upon arriving in Calgary, their good luck seemingly ran out as there was no one there at the train station to meet them. So my parents were there with three children, no way to contact my uncles, and unable to speak English. Well, through the good graces of some strangers they were able to arrange a taxi to take them to my uncle's farm. The only problem was that neither my father nor the driver who had agreed to take them knew exactly where my uncle's farm lay. Not to be deterred by small details such as this, they set off in the general direction. Four hours and \$22 later they finally pulled into what seemed to be the correct yard. The only problem was that everybody was out in the fields working, so no one was at home.

When they got to the house, my father immediately thanked the driver because he knew that he had found my uncle's house. Bewildered, the driver looked around for a sign or a nameplate or some indication that would explain my father's sureness. Finally, this man asked my father how he knew. There was no name, no person in sight, and the farmhouse looked no different than a hundred other ones across the prairie.

By way of explanation my father pointed to the front step of the house, where the driver saw shoes lined up neatly next to the door. He was about to ask my father what he meant, when he realized that there was something different about these shoes. Upon a closer inspection he realized that they were all wooden. My father had known that he found his brother's house because of all the wooden shoes lined up at the door. The telegram my parents had sent from Winnipeg helpfully arrived four days later.

My family has lived in this area ever since, and this story of my parents setting out across the world looking for a new life, and apparently some wooden shoes, has embodied the free nature of Albertans.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce the Chamber to the new constituency of Highwood. This riding contains a diverse group of Albertans that make their living in as many ways as can be imagined. The northern part of the riding contains communities that have grown exponentially in the past few years. Many of the people in this area make their living in Calgary but have chosen to live in a more rural setting.

The west of the riding is dominated by the foothills of the Rockies, and in the east there is the broad expanse of the prairies. The constituency is bordered by the Bow River on the north and stretches a good portion of the way to Nanton in the south. The riding is bisected by No. 2 highway, and as you travel along this road from Calgary, you can see the population density start to thin and an increasing amount of agricultural land come into view. The land in this area is rich, and the farmers and ranchers are able to raise a variety of crops and livestock, from canola to cattle and cereal grains to poultry.

I have the privilege of representing the Stoney Nakoda people, who make the Eden Valley reserve their home. Theirs is a proud

history of the plains people, who made the vast prairies and the foothills their home throughout western Canada and the United States.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Highwood are as varied as the geography and are a great cross-section of those who call Alberta home. For all their uniqueness my constituents share common concerns with each other and other Albertans. Postsecondary education, health, infrastructure, and the maintenance of the environment for future generations are all priorities of Albertans. The Speech from the Throne demonstrated that they are the priorities of their provincial government. The Speech from the Throne, given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, charted a course that will build on the four pillars of the 20-year plan first discussed in this Chamber last February.

Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to hear of the government's commitment to moving ahead with the water for life strategy. Highwood is a part of the Bow River watershed, with both the Sheep River and the Highwood River flowing into the Bow. Over the years that I have lived on the banks of the Bow River, I have seen the changes that development has initiated on our rivers and streams. I am proud to live in a province that is committed to such an aggressive environmental protection program and continues to show this commitment in actions and not just words.

As I mentioned earlier, a good number of my constituents have chosen farming and ranching as their lifestyle. The Speech from the Throne outlined the government's continued commitment to stand by this province's agricultural producers. Alberta has long been known for our primary agricultural products, and now it's time to build on that reputation and shift the focus to more value-added products. The continued closure of the American border to our live cattle highlights the continued need for us to develop a larger homegrown slaughter and meat-packing industry. By increasing domestic slaughter capacity and focusing on the development of more processing plants, Albertans will be able to realize more benefits from the livestock that we raise. Moving in this direction will create more jobs in our province and create a more stable structure for marketing Alberta's beef both nationally and internationally.

This move is not limited to the beef industry but also the grain industry. In the Speech from the Throne His Honour outlined the government's continued commitment to advocating for a marketing choice for wheat and barley. The development of market choice for wheat and barley will open the doors to benefits for individual producers. The power to choose who you sell your product to is afforded to every other industry in this country. Only wheat and barley producers are forced to sell to a monopoly. The promotion of choice among producers does not call for the elimination of the Wheat Board, only the opportunity to market wheat and barley elsewhere. It will also help in the development of value-added industries focused on grains in Alberta.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, the shifting focus to value-added industries in agricultural sectors is merely the tip of the iceberg. I feel that our province needs to advance a whole value-added strategy in all sectors of our economy. Our natural resource wealth is such that we are able to make decisions and investments that are not available to other districts. In order to move away from being a primary-product economy, we need to look not only to value-added industries but to all knowledge-based industries.

As was discussed in the Speech from the Throne, the government is committed to increasing the capacity of Alberta's postsecondary education system a total of 60,000 spaces by the year 2020, and this

is exactly the type of forward thinking that is necessary to help Alberta make the transition into a leader in knowledge-based industries such as computers, medical technology, and nanotechnology.

Mr. Speaker, the final point I'd like to touch on is the added investment in Alberta's infrastructure, that was discussed when His Honour delivered the Speech from the Throne. In my constituency there is a need for overpasses at busier intersections. I feel that spending on infrastructure in this way will have a positive effect on safety on Alberta's highway system. Casualty and fatality traffic accidents are a tragedy that no jurisdiction is immune to.

The Speech from the Throne discussed the pressing need to increase safety on Alberta's roads. I believe that one way to do this is to reduce the number of level crossings on busy highways such as the number 2. On the northern edge of my constituency, on the immediate outskirts of Calgary, there are three secondary highways which cross the number 2 within a 30-kilometre stretch. The ever-increasing volume of traffic on highway 2 combined with the ever-increasing volume of traffic on the secondary roads in my constituency means that the issue of traffic safety is becoming more and more prominent. The province's investment in infrastructure is a way to deal with this.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a land of endless opportunity, and we are in a position to seize it. By working with our constituents, we'll be able to provide the government that Albertans chose and give the services that Albertans need. I look forward to working with the people of Highwood and my colleagues here in the Legislature to make the Alberta advantage an even better one.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29 if anybody wishes to ask a question, you may do so now.

Okay. There being none, any other speakers? The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a pleasure for me to rise today to deliver my maiden speech as the representative of the people of the constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat. It's with a great deal of pride that I'm able to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate you and your two colleagues on being elected to your honourable positions. I'm sure your experience and guidance will help myself and the many new members adapt to our roles as MLAs.

I'd also like to formally congratulate all the members of the House on their recent election, especially those who are here for the first time. When the constituents of the areas we represent went to the polls last November, they gave us the trust to do what is best for them and what is best for Alberta. I must admit that I find this a very daunting task. The decisions we make inside this Chamber touch every aspect of the lives of Albertans, and I'm extremely honoured that the constituents of Cypress-Medicine Hat put their faith and trust in myself and the entire Conservative Party team to make the right decisions. While I realize that as a government we won't be able to please every single Albertan, I'll be very diligent in my role to ensure that whatever is done is done in the best interests of Alberta.

As I was preparing what I was going to say for this response to the Speech from the Throne, I was looking back at many speeches and articles from the years past, some as far back as 1971. I initially thought that these speeches, being given by a variety of those community leaders and previous MLAs, would be out of date and out of touch with the needs of Albertans at the dawn of this new

century, but after reading a few things by a vast number of orators, I quickly discovered that I was wrong. Mr. Speaker, Albertans' attitudes and entrepreneurship haven't really changed.

As each decade passes, there hasn't been a great variance in the issues, just a change in technologies. The need for gravel roads has changed into needs for highway interchanges. X-ray machine demand in the health sector has moved towards MRI and CT scanners. In education the expansion of the consolidated one-room schools has moved towards having our rural schools hooked up to the SuperNet. Several schools in my constituency are hooked up to live video conferencing to allow students to interact with a variety of scholars and experts that they wouldn't have been previously able to without this new technology.

Even with the great leap of technological advances in all areas of our lives, the one common theme that keeps occurring over and over is opportunity. Albertans, I feel, are interested in having the opportunity to succeed. They believe that the best social safety net is a job. They aren't looking for handouts. They just want a chance to work hard and be successful through their own blood and sweat.

What has been very eloquently presented to us by the hon. Lieutenant Governor, Norman Kwong, is the direction in which Albertans have always wanted their government to go. In years past the dark cloud of debt has loomed above, but thanks to my colleagues here in this House and many who are no longer here, including my predecessor Dr. Lorne Taylor, our future plans do not include budgeting for the debts of years past.

Now the focus is solely on the people of Alberta, which most definitely includes the constituents of Cypress-Medicine Hat. What do the people of southeast Alberta want from this province? Well, the southeast portion of this province was where the settlement of southern Alberta began. The prairies of southeast Alberta are filled with the remnants of those who, as our Lieutenant Governor mentioned, settled this land with all the hopes and dreams that we can only wonder about as we travel the back roads of Alberta and see the remnants of these hopes and dreams in the abandoned farmsteads. One can only imagine what drove these people to leave their homes and families to come overseas to settle here.

From working here, living here, and knocking on doors in Cypress-Medicine Hat, I've heard a great deal of stories of how they came to this beautiful corner of Alberta and what they expect for the future. The one thing I hear resonating through each and every discussion is the feeling of pride they have for their family, their career, and their province. This feeling of pride encompasses all aspects of their lives, whether it's pride in putting every ounce of their being into growing the best crops their fields can yield, using their skills in their respective professions, or working hard to pass that final exam at Medicine Hat College.

I know that the people associated with the large agricultural sector will be pleased with the direction you've put forward today. Agriculture is no longer just a way of life; it's also a proud business. When we provide increased domestic processing capabilities, press hard to expand our value-added sector, and push hard for market choice, we provide opportunity.

The agricultural industry through past droughts and especially the cattle and grain industries for what they've been going through in the past several years aren't sitting back and waiting for the government to give them a cheque. Instead, they want the opportunity to do what they do best, which is working hard and taking pride in what they do. But there are times when the weather or a prolonged border closure threatens the very core of the industry. Government needs to provide assistance. Industry is very appreciative of the assistance this government has provided in the past. Our past programs and future plans outlined in the Speech from the Throne are providing a hand up to industry, not a handout.

3:40

I'm quite proud to say that we are continuing to provide opportunity to our agricultural sector. Opportunity for increased domestic processing and value-added products can sometimes require more than hard work. With the continued growth of the global marketplace, farming isn't just planting seeds or taking feed out to cattle. It's big business, and we need information technologies to succeed. Our youth are coming back to the farm with a firm grasp about how new technologies can improve yields and have a more efficient operation.

Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure that our rural communities remain vital components of Alberta. A healthy and strong rural Alberta strengthens the entire provincial economy, and it enhances the quality of life for all Albertans. I'm very excited to be a part of the Rural Development Strategy Task Force, led by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. We have such a wealth of creative and innovative individuals on this committee. It's amazing the sorts of ideas regarding sustained growth of our rural communities that are already coming forth in the preliminary meetings of this task force. Rural communities have been the backbone of this province, and I look forward to helping to build upon the four pillars that have been initially developed through the rural development strategy.

Mr. Speaker, people kid us southeastern Albertans about being rednecks. It's true; we are rednecks. But that's just because we enjoy being out in the sun, enjoying areas of the province that haven't been discovered by most Albertans, like the Sweetgrass hills and the Milk River badlands.

I just want to clarify something: there really is no milk in the Milk River. My four-year-old grandson had just recently asked as we were driving through this region: Grandpa, are we really going to see a river full of milk? Like any responsible grandfather, I told him that wasn't the case and that it was named that way because of the muddy and murky appearance of the water.

Imaginative and inquisitive thinking isn't something us rednecks are lacking. We have the same dreams and interests in technology and innovation as every other Albertan. Southeastern Albertans are on the forefront of some technological research, particularly unmanned vehicle research. Mr. Speaker, representatives from countries around the world came to southeast Alberta last year to watch live demonstrations of unmanned vehicles at the Defence Research and Development Canada range at Suffield, just outside of Medicine Hat. This experience cannot be achieved anywhere else in Canada and in very few places in the world. Companies in Medicine Hat built the drones, the unmanned aircraft that are being used for surveillance in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Swedish navy came to the desert of southeast Alberta to demonstrate and purchase Barracudas, unmanned sea vehicles. Cutting-edge technologies have been developed and are continuing to be developed in southern Alberta.

To continue the economic development of the region, the people of Cypress-Medicine Hat need the education and information to compete globally. This is why I'm very excited to hear about Alberta's promise to make strengthening our postsecondary system a top priority, which includes the creating of 60,000 new postsecondary spaces by the year 2020 and the Lois Hole digital library. It can be costly to have well-stocked libraries in every single community in Alberta, and it's so exciting to hear that our constituents will have instant access to such a wealth of information. I find it very fitting and appropriate that this digital library was named after one of the biggest advocates for learning this province has been fortunate enough to be graced with. A remarkable woman who dedicated her life to learning will now forever be a part of all Albertans' lifelong learning.

Education will create the backbone of Alberta's economy as we

move forward into the future, and I know that I along with the constituents of Cypress-Medicine Hat look forward to witnessing the direct impact this commitment to education will have on our communities. The commitment to education that has been put forward through the Speech from the Throne will be looked back upon as the proverbial starting blocks that launched Alberta's economy into a new era. While our natural resources will still play a prominent role in Alberta's future, with the access to the future we will be experiencing from the direction put forward in the Speech from the Throne, our economy will be diversifying with an extremely well-trained and educated workforce.

There's great opportunity in store for the future of Alberta. From the very beginning of this province 100 years ago whenever opportunity was present, the hard-working people of southeast Alberta have taken advantage of the situation and excelled. The Premier has set forth an agenda which will allow for each and every Albertan to share in the Alberta advantage. I thank him for that, and so do the people of Etzikom and the people of Manyberries, the people of Hilda and the people of Schuler. I feel quite fortunate in being given the opportunity to represent the great people of Cypress-Medicine Hat during these exciting times. The future of our province looks very bright.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29 kicks in. Any questions?

There being none, the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: It's a great honour to rise in this House with much pride and excitement to deliver my maiden speech, pride because I represent the great riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie, excitement because I am looking forward to working for the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie, who have placed their trust in me.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your election as the Deputy Chair of this House. Your reputation as a parliamentarian ensures that you will carry out your duties with confidence, nonpartisanship, and expertise.

I would like to thank my constituents from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to represent them here in this Assembly. I extend my warm greetings to my colleagues on all sides of this House, I congratulate them on their election or re-election to this Assembly, and I am looking forward to working with each one of them to serve the best interests of all Albertans. We are here to best serve the public's interest, and I am confident that each member is as committed as I am to perform that commitment.

The throne speech is obviously an expression of this government's desire to pursue a certain level of action over the next four years. Mr. Speaker, what I find in this speech was clearly a reaction to the pressure the Alberta Liberals put on this government for years and years. What I heard was a collection of strong Liberal ideas watered down and repackaged as Tory policies. Alberta Liberals have long argued for increasing the minimum wage, restoring seniors' benefits, inflation-proofing the heritage savings trust fund, and an endowment fund for postsecondary education. These were the issues Albertans and the Alberta Liberal opposition have demanded action on for years and years.

It's great to see the government finally responding to overdue issues such as increasing AISH rates. There is still confusion in the area of health care in Alberta, and the throne speech did very little to clear things up. Albertans are anxious to see some more concrete plans. They want government to spend taxpayers' money wisely and build permanent wealth for this province.

I'm glad to hear that the government wants to honour a great

Albertan, the late Lois Hole. If the government is really, really serious about it, then they should adopt the Liberals' Motion 502 to eliminate library card fees from public libraries throughout Alberta and double the funds for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts as she was a strong supporter of more funding to public libraries and the arts community. I think a tribute for Lois Hole is something that would benefit all Albertans.

3:50

It seems that too often we find ourselves out to score political points. We are not here for the benefit of the media but for the benefit of the people of this province. Scoring cheap political points does nothing to help the people of this province. [some applause] Thank you. Only constructive criticism, original ideas will truly help the people each of us represents. Members must question government initiatives and oppose them when it is necessary and only support the government when support is warranted. Like all Albertans, my constituents have great expectations of all of us. The people are looking for their government to be guided by professionalism, to be true to the government's promise of an open and a responsible government, a government that is frugal when dealing with Albertans' purse strings. We promised Albertans that. That is what we will do for them.

Mr. Speaker, I draw your attention to the cultural diversity within the riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie. I intend to pursue the interests of my great riding, and I will do my level best to voice their concerns in this Legislative Assembly. I am proud to be an elected Member of the Legislative Assembly for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and I am proud to be an Albertan. I am committed to serving both Edmonton-Ellerslie and all Alberta.

Let me tell you and through you tell all the members of this House the real concerns that I heard as I went door to door seeking support for my election. The people of my riding want us to protect their public health care system from being a privatized, two-tiered system. The people feel that our health care system can be reformed by reducing the waiting times for medical treatment and surgery; by aggressively recruiting and training more sufficient numbers of doctors, nurses, and other professionals in the health care system; by actively encouraging the development of specialized surgical centres within the public health care system; and by increasing the number of beds in Edmonton as well as in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents also want us to improve their education system. They believe that the place to start is within the classroom, from prekindergarten through to postsecondary. Their belief is that our aim must be for excellence in our education system. My constituents want us to focus on strengthening the postsecondary system and increasing accessibility to education. They want every Albertan to have the opportunity to reach their personal potential by recognizing and supporting the classrooms.

The people of my riding want us to restore key seniors' benefits and to put measures in place which ensure that all seniors can live safe and comfortable lives.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie want to see improved law and order in this province. They are concerned, and rightly so, with the level of crime involving our youth. They want us to take a firmer stand in the elimination of youth crime in this province.

Thanks to the windfall of energy revenues over years and years, Alberta's economy is flourishing. History shows that this cannot last forever. The people of my riding want us to start translating our current energy boom into permanent long-term prosperity. They want the opportunity to build a truly remarkable future. Long-term, sustainable policies are required to preserve what we have today.

My constituents look to the government to focus on spending smarter, living more within our own means, and continuing to support the Alberta heritage trust fund.

Deregulation of the power industry has created many challenges for Albertans. They pay a high price for gas and electricity. If we restored affordable, stable electricity rates for homeowners and businesses, the people of this province would be able to reinvest more within Alberta.

There is so much room to make Alberta's future better. There is so much this Assembly can do to make it better. We can manage what we have so much better. We can reach so much higher. Let's all start building a better future for Alberta.

I pledge to all of you my respect and gratitude for helping make Alberta the best and the most prosperous province in Canada. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29 kicks in. Any questions?

There being none, the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, this is the time when MLAs rise to react to the Speech from the Throne and then give their maiden speech. I'd just like to thank the government for making my job a whole lot easier today. The Speech from the Throne was such an uninspiring document that to comment on it would be like trying to write a review of an instruction manual. As a former newspaper editor I look forward to the cut and thrust of debate as we discuss changing colons to semicolons.

In a more serious vein, Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today as a member of the Alberta Legislature, particularly so on this 100th anniversary year of Alberta's founding as a province. I am especially proud to say that the Tougas family has been part of Alberta since almost the beginning. My father, Richard, who is in the gallery today, turns 86 two days after Alberta's 100th birthday, and he is a born and bred Edmontonian. [some applause] I wasn't expecting that.

I'm genuinely humbled that the people of Edmonton-Meadowlark chose me to be their representative, and I would like to express my thanks to the small but very dedicated corps of volunteers who helped out an election campaign that began for me just the day before the election was called. I would especially like to thank Fay Stankov and Bonnie Rawlyn for their efforts on my behalf.

As exciting as it was to win the election, I harbour no illusions. Like all who assume elected office, it is important to remember that no matter how big or small your victory, only a minority of your constituents actually chose you. We as legislators should always be cognizant of the fact that we are here to serve not just those who voted for us or those who support our party but all of those who live in our constituency and our province.

Edmonton-Meadowlark represents a fairly typical cross-section of Alberta. There are slightly more women than men, a fact that is at odds with the makeup in this Legislature. There is a large and diverse ethnic community, with nearly 6 per cent of the population speaking neither official language at home. I found that out several days door-knocking. The largest ethnic group is Chinese, with the largest group of immigrants coming from the Philippines. Nearly 5 per cent of the population is aboriginal, a reflection of Edmonton's status as having the fastest growing aboriginal population of any city in the country. There's a strong seniors presence in Meadowlark, and shortly the Westend Seniors Activity Centre will be moving into a bright new location in the Terra Losa community. I would like to acknowledge the work done by the previous Edmonton-Meadowlark MLA, Bob Maskell, in securing the grants for the expansion.

4:00

Edmonton-Meadowlark is lucky to have the Misericordia hospital in its midst. The hospital survived a brush with death of its own a few years ago when reckless government downsizing left it a shell of its former self. Happily, the Misericordia is returning to form, and a major expansion and reorganization is in the works. The hospital's most outstanding contribution is the craniofacial reconstruction unit, called COMPRU, a world-class facility dedicated to the reconstruction of the face, head, and neck. It also offers the only publicly funded hyperbaric oxygen program in Alberta.

In most communities a hospital would be the most important structure, but in Edmonton-Meadowlark one structure dominates, West Edmonton Mall, virtually a city within a city. To those of us who live near the mall or drive by it every day, it has become part of the landscape that we take for granted. It's easy to lose sight of the fact that West Edmonton Mall is the largest shopping and entertainment complex on the planet and one of Alberta's top tourist attractions. The fact that the world's largest shopping centre would be located in a remote western Canadian city and built by a family of immigrants speaks volumes about the Alberta spirit and the Edmonton attitude.

Among the many attractions of West Edmonton Mall is something called the Palace Casino. Now, a generation ago the idea that a casino would be operating in the heart of a residential area of Alberta would have seemed preposterous, but today casinos are as much a part of the landscape as grain elevators once were. There is even going to be one in Camrose in the near future.

When I was asked by the Leader of the Opposition what portfolio I would like to oversee, I asked for Gaming. Over the years I have watched with fascination and growing concern as what was for most of Alberta's history considered a vice is now a major contributor to the Alberta economy. The progression of gambling from being a crime to a cash cow for government has been insidious, so gradual that it came upon us with hardly anyone noticing.

I remember well, when I was a kid growing up in west Edmonton, how my normally law-abiding father would occasionally purchase something called an Irish sweepstakes ticket. [interjections] Yeah, a few of you remember Irish sweepstakes tickets. Now, sweepstakes were illegal in Canada at the time, but for whatever reason the authorities looked the other way when it came to the Irish sweepstakes. My dad won a hundred pounds, by the way. Eventually Canada got into the sweepstakes game with the Olympic lottery, a \$10 ticket whose million dollar prize draw was a major televised event. Now, just like income tax, the lottery was intended to be temporary, and we all know how that turned out.

As late as 1967 sanctioned gambling in Alberta consisted of dart throws, crown and anchor wheels, and hoop-toss games of chance, of skill at agricultural fairs. These quaint days would end in July of that year when the Edmonton Exposition was allowed to open its first temporary casino during Klondike Days. Two years later Calgary had its first casino during the Stampede, and by 1970 Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer all had casinos running during their agricultural fairs. Pandora's box had opened, and there was no closing it now.

Alberta's first permanent casino, the appropriately named Cash Casino in Calgary, opened 25 years ago this year, but it wasn't until VLTs and slot machines were introduced into Alberta casinos and bars that gambling in Alberta made the quantum leap from games that required skill and knowledge to something that anyone with a quarter and the ability to push a button could do. Alberta today has the highest per capita gambling expenditure on all forms of licensed gambling as well as the highest per capita VLT expenditures. While

charities and casino operators have benefited mightily, it is the province that has cashed in on casinos in a big way. On average, Canadian provinces receive 3 per cent of their provincial revenue from gaming. In Alberta it's 4.8 per cent.

The big money streams in in the form of quarters, nickels, dimes, and now even pennies. There are more than 6,500 slot machines in Alberta casinos, and in 2002-2003 Albertans pumped approximately \$9.3 billion into these one-armed bandits, most of which don't even have arms anymore because that makes them too slow to play. Now, it is true that most of it, \$8.6 billion, was paid out in prize money, but that still left a \$683 million profit. Compare that to the mere \$122 million in profit from table games, and you see where the real money comes from in a casino.

So how did this happen? How did Alberta go from being closed on Sunday to having seven-day-a-week casino gaming until 3 a.m.? Well, the answer can be summed up in a line from my favourite TV series, *The Simpsons*. That's for you, boys. When Springfield was considering opening a casino to cure its economic woes, straight-arrow Ned Flanders asked Reverend Lovejoy to rule on the morality of government-run gaming. Reverend Lovejoy's answer perfectly describes how gaming came to become such an integral part of the Alberta community. In the words of the Reverend, once something has been approved by the government, it is no longer immoral.

The government's enthusiastic introduction of VLTs and casino gaming into Alberta has created a pyramid of addiction. The government is addicted to the easy revenue of gaming. As casino owner Montgomery Burns said in the same *Simpsons* episode, "I've discovered the perfect business. People swarm in, empty their pockets, and scuttle off." Charities and registered societies are addicted to casinos. Charities are walking away with \$50,000, \$60,000, or \$70,000 for a few hours' work, the kind of money it would take years of hard work to raise by more conventional means.

At the bottom of the pyramid of addictions is the lowly gambler, the very people the government likes to call Martha and Henry. It's not the high rollers who are greasing the casino wheels in Alberta. The real money comes from Martha and Henry, who are whiling away the hours joyously pumping coin after coin into slot machines.

I went to Palace Casino last Sunday minutes after it opened at 10 a.m. Already slot jockeys, as they call them, were taking up their places behind their favourite machines based on comfortable TV shows like *Wheel of Fortune*, *Jeopardy*, or even the *Munsters*. I chatted with a charming older woman who enjoyed playing a slot machine based on the game show *The Price is Right*. She happily explained how the machine worked and, while doing so, promptly hit a decent payday. About \$35 in nickels spewed out of the machine. "If I'm smart," she said, "I'd quit right now." I saw her again about a half hour later, still playing the same game, her stash of nickels dwindling down to nothing. Such is the power of the slot machine. Its mindless simplicity has turned thousands of people into addicts and destroyed innumerable lives.

AADAC estimates that 5.2 per cent of Albertans experience moderate to severe problems as a result of their gambling. We've all heard of friends, acquaintances, or loved ones, the Marthas and Henrys of Conservative mythology, whose lives have been destroyed by slot machine addiction. With three new casinos approved and a number of others on the way, the number of VLTs and slot machines will continue to rise. Yes, VLTs and slots have fattened the government coffers and made life easier for charities, but I ask a question that should have been asked a long time ago: at what cost?

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I must mention that the first of four funerals for the slain RCMP officers was held in Stony Plain this afternoon. The deaths of the four Mounties was a diabolical crime that shocked the nation and shook our belief in peace, order, and

good government, that Canada was founded upon. On behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Meadowlark I would like to express our collective condolences to the families of the four brave Mounties who died in the line of duty.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29. Any questions?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor a few days ago. I guess that in one sense that was His Honour's maiden speech, and I want to congratulate him on that as well as all hon. members who have risen in this House and delivered their first speech. I actually wish this was my first speech because things were very different in 1993, and the opportunities today are so great for this province that I wish I was starting again.

Mr. Speaker, one of my passions in life is education, whether it may be at the primary, secondary, or postsecondary level, for all Albertans. An educated mind opens many, many doors for those who are willing to make the effort and the sacrifice to obtain an education. Having said that, there are some skills that are definitely more in demand than others, and this is nowhere more apparent than in this province. As the Lieutenant Governor stated, Alberta has an enviable quality of life, low unemployment, and a very high employment growth. It is this issue of employment that I want to spend a little bit of time on today.

4:10

The economic successes in our province have proven to be a benefit to most Albertans. Historically and currently natural resources have been the source of our wealth, fuelling our economy and driving our growth rates. The growth of the oil and gas sectors has been exponential, and with high natural resource prices it appears that this growth will be sustained for at least some time in the foreseeable future.

While natural resources are currently fuelling our growth, it takes many well-oiled parts to keep our economy functioning properly. The Alberta economy is currently looking at the possibility of shortages in one of its key parts, skilled labour. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that Alberta as well as all of western Canada is experiencing a mounting problem with skill shortages. The Canada West Foundation authored a series of well-researched reports to examine the issue in western Canada, as has the TD Bank Financial Group, and also other reports put out by the Economic Development Authority.

The Canada West Foundation highlights an interesting trend. In specific areas Alberta and other western provinces are currently experiencing labour shortages, and the industries themselves feel that these shortages are going to get worse before they get better. Most notably, current shortages exist in health care and most of the trades, transportation, and equipment operation. In the future industry associations expect the shortages here to worsen but also to begin to have a greater effect on primary industries, sales and service industries, processing, manufacturing, and utility industries.

The shortage of skilled labour in certain industries in Alberta has been attributed to the rapid growth of the economy. In a sense we're looking at the possibility of becoming victims of our own success. This labour shortage is currently being felt most acutely in the skilled trades, and this is for several reasons. The demand for jobs in this area has grown, there are fewer Albertan students choosing to pursue a trade in these areas, and the demographic make-up of this

sector of the workforce is one that is fast approaching retirement age.

The Speech from the Throne highlighted the government's commitment to postsecondary education in our province. This includes not only colleges and universities but also trade schools and technical institutes. There exists a large demand for skilled labour in specific industries in our province. In fact, this demand is so great that industry is beginning to look at international sources to fill this labour requirement. The creation of 60,000 postsecondary seats by 2020 will work to relieve the pressure being felt in these areas and ensure that the provincial economy does not falter due to a lack of skilled labour. Additionally, these seats will help Alberta make the transition from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. Mr. Speaker, by making Alberta a leader in learning, we can ensure that the prosperity we currently enjoy is passed on to our children and our grandchildren.

I'm most pleased to inform the House about a project that I'm proud to be a small part of, and that is the WorldSkills Competition, to be held in Calgary in September 2009. Mr. Speaker, over 40 countries will come to Calgary to compete in 38 or so skills and trades in what will be the largest international event to be held in Calgary since the 1988 Winter Olympics. In preparation for these competitions the government is working with the organizing committee to make a major difference in the skills and the attraction of the skills that we have in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's well known that there currently exists a bias or a culture within our society that favours university training. This exists all over the world. When I was in Switzerland in 2003 to look at the WorldSkills Competition to see if we should bring it to Alberta, there were people there from 40 countries, and they all had the same problem: how do we deal with the bias that we find in our schools with respect to skills versus university, how do we change the mindset of parents who want all their kids to be brain surgeons, and how do we excite our kids to the phenomenal opportunities that exist throughout this province? We're working to minimize this bias by better informing our teachers and our parents that one can have a great life in the trades while seeing every day the fruits of one's labour.

Mr. Speaker, we're taking steps to excite teachers and parents but most of all Alberta students to the fantastic opportunities that exist here in Alberta in any walk of life. We want to excite our young people earlier in life and perhaps provide virtual mentors via SuperNet. A turned-on student does so much better than one that is not.

Fifty years ago, Mr. Speaker, a great teacher of mine said some very simple things to me about career selection. He said: Denis, the term "vocation" comes from the Latin word "vocare," which is a voice from within. He said: you need to listen to your voice from within, find out what makes you energetic, what makes you lazy, what makes you happy, what makes you sad, and once you know yourself, you will know what to be in life. I never forgot that, and I really think that we need to in fact help our children find their voice from within, and we need to fan the flame, whatever it may be. As parents the best thing we can do for our children is to fan the flame of their passion in whatever direction they wish to go.

Another important element, Mr. Speaker, is ethics. The number one reason that our kids lose their first job in many, many cases is that they have a lack of work ethic. That's reported by most employers that you talk to as the reason why kids lose their first job. In other words, they don't care if they turn up on time, or they don't care what kind of job they do. So it's important to have a good work ethic.

One of the other elements that's being included in this

WorldSkills Competition preparation is the inclusion of values and attitudes. It's the inclusion of all of those things that we want all of our kids to have with respect to work ethics.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm excited about the potential referred to in the throne speech and the vision of both of our ministers of education, in both K to 12 and advanced ed, and the new investment that is being promised for education in this province.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29 kicks in. Any questions?

Anybody else wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to be in this Assembly. It was some 30 years ago that I first walked into this building and walked up above you there in the press gallery and spent five years there. I spent another five years looking down on this Legislative Assembly floor, so it gives me a great deal of pleasure to come back and actually sit on the floor of the Assembly some 20 years later.

I'm also extremely honoured to be representing a constituency that has some incredible tradition and has been represented by some very special people. Karen Kryczka represented this constituency eloquently for two terms. Prior to Karen's representation, we were very fortunate to have Elaine McCoy as the representative for two terms. Prior to that, Peter Lougheed represented this constituency for almost two decades, and I think his legacy lives on. In Calgary-West we did experiment for one term with a Liberal, but we quickly decided that that wasn't the way to go, and we're back to electing Conservatives.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, Calgary-West is a constituency that I'm proud to say is the home of our new Lieutenant Governor. He will serve this Legislature extremely well, and he has, as by his own admission, big boots to fill. I did not have the pleasure of sitting in this Assembly when Lois Hole was the Lieutenant Governor, but I did have the honour of meeting her on several occasions, and like so many people have said so well, we will miss her a great deal.

Mr. Speaker, the boundaries of Calgary-West have changed so dramatically in those 20 years, and that is typical of the growth of that particular city that we call home. When the constituency was represented by Peter Lougheed some 20 to 25 years ago, for the most part the western boundary was Sarcee Trail. Today with the exception of the community of Glenbrook my eastern boundary is Sarcee Trail. So we have some 40,000 constituents now living in Calgary-West in an area that at one point in time was farms, acreages, CFCN, and the Hart house.

It is a constituency that has a high standard of living. People have good jobs. I always believed that we had the highest household per capita income. I'm now told that my good friend from Calgary-Hays has the constituency with the highest per capita income, but second isn't bad.

As I said, it's a constituency where people are well educated. They are proud to be taking part in the Alberta advantage. But one of the things that I noticed that came up consistently in the election on November 22 was that people were concerned that their children were not going to have the same opportunities that they have because they were unable to get, in many cases, the ability to attend postsecondary education. So it was with a great deal of pride when the Premier announced about a month ago that we would be increasing the number of postsecondary education spaces by 15,000 over the next three years. Mr. Speaker, that is an example of this

government listening, caring, and acting on what Albertans want.

While my constituency has a high per capita income, the other thing that I heard at the doors was that we also have to take care of those people who are less fortunate. I heard on several occasions that we needed to review the payments to our AISH recipients. Again, our throne speech laid out what we are going to do for people who are on AISH, and I'm proud to say that I'm part of a government that is going to look after the people who are less fortunate.

The other thing that I heard consistently at the doors was: "Do not go on a spending spree. Yes, we are in a fortunate position with a surplus, but do not become a Liberal once you get to Edmonton and spend all of our dollars." Mr. Speaker, what I heard was: we have a heritage fund, we are proud of our heritage fund, we need to start to put the revenue from our heritage fund back into the heritage fund, and we need to start to commit a percentage of our nonrenewable resource revenue on an annual basis to the heritage fund. That is one thing that I am proud to say that I intend on pursuing in the next four years.

I'm also concerned, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that I found that troubled me when I was going door to door was that more often than I wanted to hear it, people said: "Well, it doesn't really matter. I don't vote anyway." I would like to try to convince people in this Assembly that that is an area that we must take a serious look at and

figure out how we can convince people that they do have a democratic right to vote. I recall a month or so ago when people were driving a thousand kilometres from Vancouver to Calgary to vote in the Iraqi election, and we have people in this country, 1 out of 2 people in the municipal election and the provincial election, who simply didn't take the time to vote.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to speak long. I want to conclude my remarks tonight by saying that I'm incredibly grateful to my family, to my campaign team, and to the 6,964 residents of Calgary-West who gave me the pleasure of sitting in this Legislature. For the 6,440 who did not vote for me and voted for another candidate, I intend to work very hard to get their support in the next election.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn the Assembly until 8 o'clock this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:26 p.m.]

