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The 27th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome. I would ask that all hon. members remain standing after the prayer so that we may pay tribute to our former colleagues who have passed away since we last met.

As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so that our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future. Amen.

Dr. Carl Michael Paproski

January 25, 1945, to January 13, 2008

The Speaker: On Sunday, January 13, 2008, Dr. Carl Michael Paproski passed away at the age of 62 years. Dr. Paproski was first elected in the provincial election held November 2, 1982, and served until March 8, 1986. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Edmonton Kingsway for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Dr. Paproski served on several committees: Public Accounts; Public Affairs; Private Bills; Select Special Committee on Senate Reform; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; and the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee.

Pamela Trainor Barrett

November 26, 1953, to January 23, 2008

The Speaker: Former Member of the Legislative Assembly Pamela Trainor Barrett passed away on January 21, 2008, at the age of 54 years. Ms Barrett was first elected in the election held May 8, 1986, and served until May 18, 1993. In September of 1996 she was elected leader of the Alberta New Democrats and re-elected to the Legislature on March 11, 1997, and served until February 2, 2000. During her years of service she represented the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands for the Alberta New Democrats.

During her terms of office Ms Barrett also served as Official Opposition House Leader and deputy leader. She served on the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services; Public Affairs; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries; Law and Regulations; Select Special Committee on Constitutional Reform; Legislative Offices; Select Special Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Review Committee; Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office. Family members of Pam Barrett are with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. member Carl Paproski and hon. member Pam Barrett as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery.

These guests are family members and friends of our former colleague Pamela Barrett. Pam's sisters Brenda Clancy, Jennifer Barrett, and Bernice Brenneman are with us today and are joined by Pam's friends Arlene Chapman, Joan Walsh, and Brian Burchnall. If they would rise, please, and receive the warm welcome from the Assembly.

Mrs. Leskiw: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to introduce to you and through you Mr. Ernie Isley, a former MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. He served our constituency from the 19th to the 22nd Legislatures. He's accompanied by his wife, Sheila, and they are seated in your gallery today. I would ask them to rise and receive a warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two grade 6 classes coming from my hometown. With the classes are their teachers, Mrs. Emma Holota and Mrs. Christie Roche; student helpers Miss Melissa Breen, Miss Courtney Dubeau, Mr. Elvis Sibal, Mrs. Sheila Nelson, and Miss April Braithwaite; also the bus driver, Mr. Ronald Ulanicki. As I met with them before this session, I asked them what they would feel would be important to say about them. They very quickly told me that they were the most talented, intelligent, creative, best looking, and have the best hockey players from the town of Elk Point. If I could ask them to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Elniski: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly on behalf of my colleague from the Edmonton-Castle Downs constituency a group of 50 enthusiastic young students from the Dunluce elementary school in Edmonton. They are accompanied by teachers Trina Ludwig, Mrs. Huk, Ms Percy, and parent helper Mrs. Melnyk. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me – and this doesn't happen very often because, as you know, it takes a day to get to where I live and a day to get back – to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Legislature students from the Margaret Wooding school who won the contest for School at the Leg. They are here today, and they are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Keri Schiebelbein, Mr. Stuart Shigehiro; practicum teacher Miss Danielle Wist; Mrs. Nola Arnold, Mrs. Connie Buick, Mrs. Jennifer Poje, Mrs. Joyce Stuber, and Mrs. Jennifer MacPhee. They're here spending the next three days at the Leg. going to school and learning about our government. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group from the Science Alberta Foundation who are having their board meetings here today. For more than 17 years the Science

Alberta Foundation has created and delivered innovative programs that promote science literacy in Alberta. They hit the families, the teachers, the librarians, the local organizations across this province. Included in the group today are Doug Annable, the chair; Elsa Cade; Evan Chrapko; Geoff Mackey; Geoff Thompson; Paul Clark; Brad Klak; Bill Hunter; Claude Mindorff; Arlene Ponting, who is the CEO. Others who have also attended today are Brian Hildebrande, Linda Palladino, Kerry Rudd, and Greg Thomas. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four guests visiting with me today seated in the members' gallery. They are members of the Kenya project of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. First of all, Mr. Henry Bosch, a director of Diaconal Ministries Canada; Nyamuhu Kabogo, who is a community developer with CRWRC. She actually lives in Nairobi, Kenya, working with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. She works with HIV awareness and women's health issues in Nairobi. Dr. Harry Cook, a retired professor of biology from The King's University College, and Izzy Huygen, a staff member of the Alberta Grain Commission. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly five members of the vigils committee to stop the privatization of medicare. This committee was formed originally in response to Bill 11 in 2000 and to the third way in 2006 and has been re-formed recently in response to suggestions that government may again be considering privatizing our health care system. The five members of the vigils committee have come to the Legislature today and will be here every Wednesday to remind the government about the importance of protecting our health care system. I would ask that the following people now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House: Pat Spady, Sylvia Krogh, Marilyn Gaa, Maurice Bourgoine, and Enneke Lorberg.

Statement by the Speaker

Assembly Business

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we start the first question period of the 27th Legislature, the chair would like to review briefly some rules concerning the operation of question period, including the rotation of questions. While today's Order Paper outlines Government Motion 8, which proposes temporary amendments to the standing orders, members may be interested to know that if they comb the Standing Orders of the Assembly, they would not find any rules concerning the operation of question period. Standing Order 7(1) states where Oral Question Period comes in the daily Routine and indicates that it shall not exceed 50 minutes. The rules concerning inappropriate language found in Standing Order 23 apply, but the operation and rotation of questions is based on the practices and the precedents of this Assembly.

Traditionally the chair has made a statement at the start of a Legislature concerning question period and other matters such as the

rotation of members' statements. In determining these matters, the chair is mindful of that fundamental principle of Canadian parliamentary law which appeared in the 1916 edition of *Bourinot's Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada* and is restated in paragraph 1 of *Beauchesne's* sixth edition, which is:

To protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority; to secure the transaction of public business in an orderly manner; to enable every Member to express opinions within limits necessary to preserve decorum and prevent an unnecessary waste of time; to give abundant opportunity for the consideration of every measure, and to prevent any legislative action being taken upon sudden impulse.

Members may be aware that the numbers of the respective caucuses in the Assembly are very similar to those at the start of the 25th Legislature following the 2001 general election. The only difference is that the Official Opposition is nine members instead of the seven that it had after the 2001 election; the government, 72 and 74. The chair sees little reason to depart from the rotation that existed at that time.

Accordingly, the Official Opposition will be entitled to the first three sets of questions, which is a main question followed up by two supplementary questions. The third party will be entitled to ask the fourth question. A member of the government caucus will be entitled to the fifth question.

The rotation will then shift back and forth between members of the Official Opposition and private members on the government side. This means that the Official Opposition will have the sixth, eighth, and 10th questions, and government members will be entitled to the seventh and the ninth questions. The third party will be entitled to the 11th question. A member from the government side will take the 12th question, and the Official Opposition will be entitled to ask the 13th question.

In 2001 the 14th and subsequent questions went to government members. In light of the fact that the Official Opposition has two more seats than it did in 2001, they should have the 15th question, with the government members being entitled to the questions after that, should there be time for that many questions.

Prior to the temporary changes adopted in the spring of 2007, the well-established rule was that there could be a preamble to the first, or main, question and no preambles to supplementary questions. Last year House leaders convinced the chair to implement a scheme where there was a 45-second time limit on questions and answers, which virtually obliterated the difference between main and supplementary questions. In the chair's view the implementation of a time limit without any restrictions on supplementary questions did not raise the level of decorum in the Assembly.

As has been done at the start of past Legislatures, the chair would like to remind all members that brevity in questions and answers is of fundamental importance to the operation of question period. The chair notes that the Canadian House of Commons imposes a time limit of 35 seconds for each question and answer. It should be made clear that it is in no way the chair's intention to limit the nature of questions asked in question period. As members well know, the chair is firmly committed to the history and traditions of parliament. In a system of responsible government it is fundamentally important that the government be held to account by the Assembly. This is a cornerstone of our system of government. Question period is an important component of that accountability. However, observing that principle does not mean that decorum becomes irrelevant. The chair is dedicated to making sure that this Assembly remains an honourable place. Furthermore, the purpose of question period is to seek information from the government about the government.

To reconcile these principles and objectives, the chair will recognize a 35-second time limit for questions and answers. There will be no preambles to supplementary questions. Supplementary questions will have to be well crafted and should not take 35 seconds. This will allow more members to participate in question period and should help reinforce the purpose of question period, which is the seeking of information. *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sections 407 to 414, provides clarity and guidance.

The practice will continue of caucuses submitting lists to the Speaker's office prior to the start of the session indicating those members wishing to ask questions that day. To facilitate the operations of the Assembly, the chair would appreciate it if the list could be submitted by 12:30 p.m. In accordance with the traditions of the Assembly the Speaker will ultimately retain discretion when it comes to recognizing members during question period, similar to the practice across Canada, out of respect for this office and this institution.

The chair would also like to comment on the rotation for members' statements. Standing Order 7(5) states:

Members' Statements shall be allocated in proportion to the number of Members other than members of the Executive Council in each party represented in the Assembly or as agreed to by House Leaders or, failing agreement, as determined by the Speaker.

As there is no House leaders' agreement concerning members' statements, the chair will have to determine the allocation.

There are 47 private members on the government side when the Speaker and members of the Executive Council are excluded. The Official Opposition has nine members, and the third party has two members. In keeping with the proportions, a member of the Official Opposition will be entitled to make a statement every day. Private members on the government side will be entitled to the other five statements for three of four days every week. On the fourth day the third party will be entitled to make a statement, which would mean that on that day, the fourth day, the government members would be entitled to four statements, the Official Opposition one, the third party one, and on the previous three days the government members five and the Official Opposition one. The chair will be accommodating if requested to change the rotation on certain days to accommodate members on a given day.

1:50

The chair would like to make one last point. The government has created a number of parliamentary assistant positions. Without detracting from the work they perform, for the purposes of the Assembly members occupying these positions are considered private members as opposed to the government. Accordingly, they may ask questions but cannot answer questions. Only members of the government, which is to say members of Executive Council, may answer. However, if a parliamentary assistant were to ask questions of the minister with whom he or she works, there might be an expression of discomfort by the chair and undoubtedly from members throughout. Furthermore, it should be noted that parliamentary assistants will not have any special prerogatives with respect to sponsoring bills. Standing Order 83 is quite clear that money bills, that is bills that require royal recommendation, must be moved by a member of the Executive Council.

Members should have received a letter from the chair dated April 8, 2008, outlining several points about decorum and operation of the Assembly. In the interest of time the chair will refrain from making any further comments about the principles underlying the operation of question period at this time. If experience is any guide, the chair will have an opportunity to review these principles as this session progresses.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Statement

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, under 13(2) just a point of clarification, as it were, asking for an explanation. Does the 35-second rule begin today? Our understanding is that today's question period at least would be conducted under the standing orders of 2006, so it's news to us. This pronouncement today is sudden news to us.

The Speaker: Well, it shouldn't be because it was announced in 2001, and in 2006 I was applying the 35-second rule as best as I could at that time. So it applies beginning now.

Oral Question Period

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

Shortage of Health Practitioners

Dr. Taft: Okay. Rock and roll. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Such a pleasure.

Hundreds of thousands of Albertans can't get family doctors because there is a shortage of doctors, and it's common for Albertans now to spend days in hospital emergency wards because beds are closed due to a shortage of nurses, yet today at a news conference the Minister of Health and Wellness waffled on whether this shortage of doctors and nurses was a serious problem in Alberta or not. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister set the record straight? Does he accept that the shortage of nurses and doctors is a major contributor to the shocking delays in patients getting the health care they need?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let me clarify some statements that I made this morning at my news conference. First of all, I believe that in Alberta and probably in all of Canada we need to look at health care in the 21st century in a different way. We need to look at health care, when it comes to doctors, that there are other means of diagnosis, whether it's through new initiatives with pharmacists, whether it's nurse practitioners. What I'd like to conclude this 35 seconds by saying is . . .

Dr. Taft: Well, I'll give the minister another opportunity. Does he or does he not believe that there is a shortage of doctors and nurses that's contributing to delays in Albertans getting the health care they need?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there are a whole bunch of reasons why our system is not performing as effectively and efficiently as it should. There is no question that there are some areas of the province where we have challenges in having the right professionals in the right place at the right time. To sort of just say, "There's one problem; fix it and all the other problems will go away," is typical of what we would normally hear from that particular leader.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, thank you. To the same minister: given that places like South Africa and the Philippines graduate enough doctors and nurses and this government can't, is this minister satisfied that Alberta is being outdone in health care by Third World countries?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I would wonder whether South Africa would necessarily be considered a Third World

country. I'd like the hon. member to go to Johannesburg and talk about South Africa being a Third World country.

I would say that we are taking initiatives relative to ensuring that there are more spaces to train our own. Clearly, any chance we have to train our own health care professionals we're going to do, but it's not going to happen overnight.

Public Health System Reform

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the Copeman Healthcare Centre will be opening in Calgary this fall, charging wealthy clients annual fees of nearly \$4,000 in order to receive health services that fall outside provincial health care plans, a mandate that hardly seems in line with the equitable health care access that the minister of health was touting at this morning's news conference. Coincidentally, the private Copeman centre will be just down the road, one block away, from the Sheldon Chumir health centre, which was forced to open with reduced capacity because of a lack of funding for emergency room doctors. Will the minister of health commit to conducting an audit of the Copeman to guarantee that its services don't contravene Alberta's health protection act?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the facility that the hon. member is referring to has been in operation, it's my understanding, for some time in British Columbia. The commission in British Columbia did an undertaking to see whether or not it contravened the Canada Health Act. The findings were that it did not. Unlike the opposition, I don't believe in doing work that's unnecessary. What we're going to do is put in place a system whereby access and future sustainability drive everything we do in health care.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister could explain why one of the main thrusts of his health policy announcement this morning centred on placing the onus for good health on individual Albertans without once acknowledging the impact of social determinants on a person's health.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said in my first answer, I believe that we have a culture in this province that has to shift with the 21st century. We have to do a better job as individuals of meeting the number one recommendation of the Mazankowski report, which is to stay healthy and look after yourself. Secondly, we have to do a better job in the system of meeting the number two recommendation in the Mazankowski report, which is to put patients first, and that's what we're talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: what's this line in here under three-month action items, "Develop a plan to register all Albertans in the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan to coincide with the plan to eliminate health care premiums"? The introduction of a deductible, perhaps?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, one of the assurances the Premier gave this Assembly back in very early February was that we were going to eliminate health care premiums, and I think Albertans endorsed that in the just recently concluded provincial election. The finance minister will have more to say about it in the budget next week.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Western Irrigation District Legal Settlement

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the third-quarter fiscal update for Budget 2007 Alberta Environment identified \$85 million for a legal settlement with the Western irrigation district. On April 2 of this year the minister put out a press release saying that they are providing \$85 million to the Western irrigation district under the Water For Life strategy, over 50 per cent of the entire Alberta Environment budget. To the Minister of Environment: why is he misrepresenting this settlement, and is he funding this under Water For Life? If so, how many other irrigation districts will be receiving . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member knows perfectly well that this is the result of the settlement of a long-standing dispute and court action. The dollars themselves will be the subject of, I'm sure, much debate during discussions on supplementary requisitions, and I look forward to the debate at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since irrigation districts do not generally store water in reservoirs, why would the government be providing public funding for a reservoir? Is the WID seeking to extend its role as a water broker in southern Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Well, I would invite the member, Mr. Speaker, to perhaps spend a little bit more time in irrigation districts. He would find out that, in fact, irrigation districts do store a significant amount of water in reservoirs. That's one of the primary roles that they have. This will allow them to enhance their ability to provide a secure source of water for their members.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the WID provided water to bail out the Balzac megamall and racetrack and then a few months later has a decades-old lawsuit settled with the government of Alberta, can the minister tell us if a deal was struck between the WID and this government?

2:00

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the only deal that was struck between the WID and this government was that that was structured by the courts in a court-arbitrated settlement. That is the issue that the member has been talking about. Financial arrangements between the Rocky View municipality and the WID are private relationships between those two parties, and the government had no involvement in that deal other than to approve the actual licence transfer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Public Health System Reform (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In recent weeks the minister of health has said publicly that he prefers the Mazankowski report and thinks that it is a guideline to introducing the so-called reforms to the health care system. This morning at a news conference the minister admitted that delisting of services is on the table.

I went through the Conservative campaign platform and, try as I might, could find no reference to delisting. My question is to the Premier. Could the Premier tell me where in the Conservative election platform they talked about delisting services in our health care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the hon. member will table our plan.

Mr. Speaker, very clearly, on March 3 Albertans voted for a government that they could trust, a government that would put in place sustainability in the health system well into the future. They also voted for someone that is committed to what has been said in this House. I refer to the Speech from the Throne, page 6, that we will work within a publicly funded health system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Mazankowski report also talked about increasing the amount of private delivery of health care services, can the Premier tell the House just where it says in this platform document that the government will increase private delivery? Why did the Premier not talk about this before the election, and now his minister is talking about it after the election?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not quite sure what he's referring to, but very clearly on day 1 of the campaign we articulated a very clear plan in terms of increasing the number of physicians in the province of Alberta, following up with a huge increase in the number of nurses graduated and LPNs. We're also working with various departments to attract people with very specific skills in health care to Alberta to fill the very many vacant positions. More to come in the next question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Conservative platform didn't include privatization or increasing user fees and given that the Speech from the Throne before the election didn't mention those things either, will the Premier admit in this House that he has no mandate to introduce privatized health care in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the only people that are talking about privatization are the opposition.

An Hon. Member: And Mazankowski.

Mr. Stelmach: You know, I don't interrupt them. I hope they would reciprocate. Maybe by the end of the session they'll learn.

All Albertans very clearly want to see clear direction in the steps we take in sustainability, access, quality of care. You're right; we have a lot of work to do. But we're also committed to improving our publicly funded health care system in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Physician Supply in Rural Alberta

Mr. Marz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the election one of the issues that was of very great concern from my constituents was the lack of rural doctors in the communities due to

retirement of doctors and population growth. My question today is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What has been done and what is being done to attract more doctors to rural Alberta communities?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raised a good question because as much as we might try to do, the doctors actually are private practice doctors, and they can choose to go wherever they might want to locate. We are working towards initiatives – it'll be rolled out over the next three to six months – where we can work with the College of Physicians and Surgeons to better incent doctors to locate outside the two larger centres.

Mr. Marz: Well, given that many residents no longer have family doctors at all, what advice does the minister have to those constituents so they can receive adequate treatment and get proper care?

Mr. Liepert: As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, to the question, there are other options, and it's everything from telehealth to a new initiative that we're taking with pharmacists that they can diagnose. Clearly, there's still going to be the requirement for the medical doctor, but again I believe we have to look at different ways of delivering health care and ensuring that health care is equitable across the province. That's our objective under the action plan released this morning.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question, to the same minister: what new plans is the minister contemplating that haven't been tried before to ensure that rural Alberta does receive its fair share of doctors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the challenges, one of the expectations is that somehow within the first 30 days we would have had answers to all of the questions and had all of the initiatives approved by what is a rather large caucus these days to get all this through. What we're going to do is take a measured approach as we move forward. This is not something that this minister is going to push. It's going to be this Conservative caucus consulting with Albertans who will decide what the future of health care looks like in this province.

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

Sexual Orientation and Human Rights

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A decade has passed since the Supreme Court of Canada's landmark decision in *Vriend* and Alberta. During this period three successive Conservative governments have failed in their duty to protect Albertans from discrimination. The time has come for this government to stop shirking its obligation to make Alberta laws consistent with the values of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Considering our new Attorney General formerly advised national and international organizations regarding human rights issues, what is her position on amending the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to write in sexual orientation?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, since the Alberta Human Rights Commission falls under the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit, I'll answer the question. We are looking at the entire Alberta

Human Rights Commission very seriously. It's a big issue for all of Alberta. It's something that needs to be looked at in its entirety, and we're going to take the time to look at all the different aspects of it. When we have something more specific to say, we'll come back to this House and report on it.

Mr. Hehr: Well, that's a wonderful answer, but I'm hoping that the Minister of Justice might be able to help us a little further on this. I wonder, Mr. Speaker, whether the minister would be willing to commit to writing sexual orientation into the act as a prohibited ground as has been done in every other Canadian jurisdiction and when Albertans might expect such action.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, again, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act falls under the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit. We will be looking at legislation and whether or not we will commit to reviewing that as we go through the prudent process of looking at all aspects.

Mr. Hehr: Well, it has been 10 years, so you'd think you'd have had ample time to do that.

Let's look at this. Sexual orientation out of the legislation violates section 15(1) of the Charter. Will the people of Alberta wait another 10 years before their government takes the necessary steps to protect their human rights?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta takes very seriously discrimination and the protection from discrimination on all grounds. As we had said, we will look at that. We right now protect on the basis of race, creed, colour, and we will certainly look at making sure that we bring our processes in line with what is happening in 2008 and the future. But, again, we'll take the time to do so, and when we have done a thorough, prudent review as Albertans require, we will tell you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:10

Health Facility Accreditation

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Health and Wellness action plan on health outlines that mandatory accreditation for all health service providers and facilities is required. I was surprised that this mandatory accreditation did not exist across the province. For my first question will the Minister of Health and Wellness please tell me why all health facilities do not have mandatory accreditation today in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the legislation that this Assembly approved some time ago states – there is a directive that health providers should make best efforts to be accredited. We are saying today that best efforts are no longer good enough. We are directing health authorities and health providers to perform region-wide accreditation reviews and report back to the ministry. Beyond that, we will also post those on the website going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister of Health and Wellness please tell me how facilities will be monitored for compliance for infection control under this new mandatory accreditation?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I should make it clear that there

aren't many facilities that aren't already accredited. There are a few in Alberta. It should also be pointed out that this is not any indication that somehow the folks who work in these facilities aren't of the utmost and highest quality in terms of their care for patients. But we want to ensure that standards are met. There is a compliance unit of the Department of Health and Wellness that will be doing these periodic reviews and will be reporting back accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much.

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

Local Authorities Pension Plan

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 15 changes were made to the Local Authorities Pension Board that effectively eliminated the voice of union representatives. This presence had ensured that changes which pension holders adamantly oppose, such as the elimination of the early retirement benefit or the 85 factor, which allows for retirement when age and years of service equal 85, did not pass unchallenged. My questions are to the minister of finance. Did the government wish for the board changes to occur because it wanted to slide through amendments which would offend pensioners, hoping they wouldn't notice?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Local Authorities Pension Board changed its voting and quorum rules to bring them in compliance with Alberta's Interpretation Act. There was nothing done to affect the security and stability of the plan. In fact, the LAPP assets are more than \$15 billion. Retirees and current members can be sure of their LAPP plans. Like all public pension plans in that sector they're all safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why were union representatives denied the information provided to other trustees regarding the legal advice on quorum and voting procedures?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have seen no evidence that union members were denied that information. In fact, throughout the campaign I noted that there were many people that came forward both as union members and people who were asking questions about the plan because of the publicity surrounding that plan, and in many cases they were very satisfied with the response that they were given. There had been no compromise, and they could get information. It was very available to them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: what is the minister going to do to satisfy the union and pension holders who are adamantly opposed to the changes that were forced upon their representatives?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, this was a case of trying to bring into alignment the correct voting procedures. There was nothing done to compromise the plan. My senior staff have advised me that there

has been a request for information and for a meeting from those individuals. They haven't identified their particular agenda at this time. They will be met with. There will be representatives from our department that will try to review exactly what their issues are and see if we can sort them out. But there's been no evidence of issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Public Health System Reform (continued)

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My main question. As the Minister of Health and Wellness outlined his plan for health care improvement this morning, he described a new role in the Alberta health care system, that of patient navigator. I believe that the number one concern of Albertans about our health care system is with access to health care services. Can the minister please explain the role and the benefits the patient navigator will bring for Albertans in care?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is very correct that access is one of the main concerns that we have with the health care system today. Access isn't just your first entry into the health care system. What we announced this morning is that we are going to move quickly on something called a patient navigator. It's in its infancy, but in essence what it does is help guide the patient through the system. So often you have situations where the patient is required over and over again to present the same kind of information, and we're going to work to streamline that.

Mr. Benito: My only supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Again my question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Shouldn't your ministry's focus be on training and recruiting doctors and nurses rather than creating and trying to fill a new role in the health system?

Mr. Liepert: As I said earlier, there are a whole bunch of things that we need to do in health care to make it more patient focused and make it more streamlined. One of them is recruitment; one of them is retention; one of them is making it easier to access the system. I think that if we take a multifaceted approach to addressing these issues, we will have a much more sustainable system into the future.

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

Child Care Services

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When federal children's services minister Ken Dryden worked with the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to establish a made-in-Alberta child care plan, it was positively embraced by Alberta's parents and caregivers. The limited and taxable benefits currently received from the federal government, however, are not meeting parental needs for affordable and accessible child care. What is especially troubling is that when federal transfers for child care do come, they disappear into the black hole of Alberta's general revenue. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: why did the \$25.9 million federal transfer not go directly toward funding badly needed child care in Alberta?

Ms Tarchuk: I'm actually pleased to offer some clarification on this issue. Last year we did receive \$25.9 million from the federal government. It is part of the \$134 million that we made available this year for child care services. The federal transfer money was

placed in general revenue, as it is in all provinces. I think the important point is that since 2003 we have spent almost \$150 million over and above what the federal government has given us.

Mr. Chase: Again to the minister: when will our province catch up with the rest of Canada and provide subsidies for before and after school care for children aged six through 12?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Speaker. The government has recently made the policy decision to extend supports beyond preschool to school-aged child care. That has been in our Speech from the Throne. When we're talking about my mandate of creating 14,000 spaces over the next three years, many of those will be out-of-school program spaces. We are currently in discussions with stakeholders, developing a plan that will include subsidies, salary supports, and initiatives to create out-of-school child care spaces.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the minister: given that the ratio for caregivers to infants has been decreased by the ministry, how will you ensure that the increase in costs is not borne by the parents and providers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ratios are being discussed as we develop the regulations to support our new child care act. We have consulted extensively with Albertans. We are paying attention to the cost factors and impacts on operators. I hope the hon. member took the opportunity to provide feedback. For the second phase of consultation completed on February 4 I have just received a summary of the findings and am now reviewing the results and will hopefully be releasing those soon.

Child Care Fees

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, last December the child resource and research unit produced a report finding that Alberta, the richest province in Canada, funded child care spaces at one-third the national average. Low levels of funding drive parent fees up, making the scarce number of available child care spaces inaccessible to low- and middle-income earners, who need to work to pay their skyrocketing rents, their power bills, their food, and their transportation costs. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: when will you stand up for parents and children and fight to increase the provincial funding to the national average, thereby capping fees for parents?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have stood up and fought on behalf of the families since the day I was appointed minister of this portfolio.

I would like to just draw attention to an important point. Whether or not and to what extent we get federal money, we do have a commitment on behalf of this province to adequately and even more than adequately fund our child care services. Just in this past year alone we had a five-point plan in place. Last year we enhanced the entire five-point plan. We raised wage top-ups. We added money to our subsidies. We increased professional development.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that Manitoba supports child care spaces at the national average and that they have daily fees capped at \$25 per day for infant care, can the minister please tell us why that can't be done here?

Ms Tarchuk: Well, I'll tell you what we are doing. As well as the enhancements that we made this current year, we also knew that we had a problem with not enough spaces. In order to create spaces – we know that we have some staffing issues – we created a staff attraction incentive, which was very successful in seeing 160 staff rejoin our child care workforce. As well, we created a space creation fund for operators to create new spaces, and we have approvals for 3,500 spaces. As we move forward and work on the mandate that the Premier has given me, we will build on all of these successes that we've seen and take a look at new initiatives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a province with such a huge labour shortage doesn't it make sense to the minister to cap fees so that parents who want to return to the workforce can?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, again I'll say that I think the best thing that we can do is build on our success story. I think that in the past year we've seen a variety of them. We see what's working. As we move forward, the \$14,000 target is very aggressive.* We will look at what is working and other initiatives that can help us create those spaces.

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

Public Health System Reform (continued)

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An action plan on health was announced today to improve access to health service and make the province's health care system more efficient and effective. The plan identifies initiatives to improve health system governance and accountability, expand health workforce recruitment, manage health services to better meet patient needs, and promote healthy and safe communities over the next nine months. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does all this talk about governance and accountability mean you'll be removing the regional health authorities?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that decision relative to governance is one that this caucus will make over the course of the next two months. I believe it is very important that if we're going to make significant changes not only to policy but to culture, we need to ensure that we have the foundation in place that can make these changes. What that's going to look like will be determined by this caucus over the due course of time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplementary to the Minister of Health and Wellness again. This is an ambitious plan with action items over the next nine months. Can you assure Albertans that these actions will have a positive impact on their lives?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can assure the hon. member is that if we don't look at changes in our system, there won't be a system here for any of us when we get to the age when we're going to need that care. These changes that we are putting forward today are just common sense. There are so many things in this system. We just need to do it, and I ask the House to support it.

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

Highway 63

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Suncor has announced that it will be building a \$55 million interchange on highway 63 in just one year. This government, on the other hand, has failed to get highway 63 twinned. To the Minister of Transportation: how is Suncor able to be so much more efficient than his ministry?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I do commend Suncor very much for stepping up to the table, making an agreement with our government that they're going to go ahead and build an interchange to make sure that they make highway 63 not only safer for all of their employees but for all Albertans that travel highway 63.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many more projects will the minister wait for until the private sector comes to the rescue?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we advance construction on roads everywhere in Alberta as fast as we possibly can within budget, and this government takes safety as one of its biggest concerns. When we're dealing with the commercial side of things, it's great when all industry that wants buys in, saying: this is for us; we will help Albertans build it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. Highway 63's horrible record of fatalities is well known, so I will ask: when can Albertans expect a fully twinned, safer highway on the entire route to Fort McMurray and the oil sands?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, on things that are happening right now with highway 63, we're building two new interchanges right in the city of Fort McMurray, we're building a new five-lane bridge across the Athabasca River, we're twinning north of Fort McMurray on highway 63, and we're also twinning the 18 kilometres to get to highway 881 to give people two different highway choices. We're advancing that construction as fast as we can.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Child Care Services (continued)

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The government recently announced the creation of almost 3,500 child care spaces over the last year, but many parents are still having difficulty finding child care in our province. What are you going to do to address this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

*See p.19, left col., para. 1

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member stated, our new space creation programs this past year have resulted in the application and approval of 3,500 spaces in 51 different communities in this province. This is good news, but we recognize that there is much more to be done, and that is why it is one of my top mandated priorities. In the coming weeks and months we will unveil a plan on how we're going to support the creation – and I should correct myself. I know earlier I said \$14,000; it was 14,000 spaces over the next three years.* Just my last comment. We will not be doing this alone; we will be working with our communities.

Mr. Cao: Well, Minister, child care communities are having difficulty finding staff, and if they don't have staff, they cannot add more spaces. What are you going to do to address this staffing issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member raises a good point. Recruiting and retaining staff is a very key component of how we can create spaces. This year we have increased wage top-ups by 40 per cent. We've implemented a new staff attraction incentive, which has allowed 160 staff to rejoin the child care sector, which is good news. We've also created a bursary to help offset educational costs. Lastly, we're developing a marketing campaign to encourage Albertans to enter the child care field. We will build on these successes, as I said earlier, and work on the staffing issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when are you going to address the need of more out-of-school care spaces as parents are badly in need of care for their children after school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the out-of-school care issues are prevalent here. Like I said earlier, the government has made a policy decision to move into the out-of-school care programming with supports. When we're talking 14,000 spaces, many of those will be out-of-school care. We are in discussions now, taking a look at how we can help through subsidies, through wage top-ups, through some new initiatives to create spaces. We will again build on our successes and move forward.

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

2:30 Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the minister of immigration and industry. Why is the government expanding the temporary foreign worker program when there are so many complaints today in the province about that very same program?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The temporary foreign worker program has provided some tremendous benefits to Albertans, and we are constantly reviewing the program and the program qualifications to make sure that there are no abuses in that.

We have established some contact numbers for individuals to lodge some of their issues with us, and we are following up on them. But our priority is to always hire Albertans first and then Canadians and then temporary foreign workers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the minister commit this afternoon to this House and to Albertans that the number that he referred to in his answer will be listed on the visa of each and every temporary foreign worker that comes to Alberta so that they know that if there's an unfair or unsafe place where they are working, they can phone that number and get help right away?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the questions. We want to assure that the workers have the information necessary, and we will continue to work with our agencies so that as workers come into the province, they have contacts with those particular agencies. We'll work with the federal government. A lot of those rules and regulations are established by the federal government, and we'll ensure that the information that they need is available to them.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that there's a significant downturn in the forestry industry and a lot of forestry workers are unemployed, why is the government expanding the temporary foreign worker program and not retraining many of the unemployed forestry workers so that they, too, can enjoy part of the Alberta boom?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated in my first answer, our priority is to hire Albertans. Those Albertans that want to work and are able and qualified to work will have priority to work in the province of Alberta, and then our next priority is to look at other Canadians, and eventually we need to look at temporary foreign workers. When we look at the numbers that are required in the province of Alberta, we have to access all three sectors to meet the needs of the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Infrastructure Costs

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret in Alberta's booming economy that construction costs have escalated rapidly in recent years. These cost pressures create monetary and management challenges for the government to provide the roads, schools, hospitals, and other public infrastructure required by Alberta's growing population. My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. What is the government doing to address escalating construction costs so Albertans have access to the infrastructure that is critical to both securing our province's future and ensuring a high quality of life for all?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say that our government is committed to completing all of the approved projects in the 2007-2010 capital plan. That represents an invest-

*See p. 18, left col., para. 6

ment in Alberta's infrastructure of more than \$20 billion. We manage the escalations in cost by adjusting our funding, of course, and when required, we review the budgets and cash flows to ensure that we get the best value for our money.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can the minister be specific regarding the techniques or efficiencies that are being applied now to mitigate growing construction costs and reduce delays for the most critical projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a variety of techniques that we use. Of course, P3 projects such as was used on the Anthony Henday southeast portion are one of the varieties. It provided government with fixed costs, fixed delivery dates, and longer warranties for that project, and using this for the better completion dates at a time that costs were soaring by 25 per cent was a very good innovation. We also have shortened design time and construction time and reduced manpower by using predesigned modular classrooms as well as core school design as will be used in the 18 schools to be constructed in Calgary and Edmonton by 2010.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure costs are manageable so that existing infrastructure is properly repaired and maintained in a timely manner?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Infrastructure is a priority of the people of Alberta as we have heard. Government surplus allocation policy allocates two-thirds of any in-year surplus to capital, with at least half of that going to maintenance and renewal. So far under the new policy more than a billion dollars has been provided to address capital maintenance. Thanks to this additional allocation we're now able to design and work on a large number of projects well ahead of time. It allows us to tender the projects at a time when contractors are less busy and resources are less scarce.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Seniors' Programs

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Senior population is on the rise within Whitecourt-St. Anne and all throughout this great province. In Alberta's booming economy the cost of living is increasing at a rate seniors are having a hard time keeping up with. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: given these pressures plus a rapidly growing seniors population, what's your ministry doing to ensure seniors, especially those on fixed and low incomes, have access to the supports they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question and to say that I'm very proud to be the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and to say that we

have a number of excellent programs in this province for our seniors. They are some of the best in the country. Those programs total up to \$2.3 billion over our ministries to support our seniors. They include monthly assistance to supplement federal programs, assistance for low-income seniors with one-time costs like home repairs, and protection from increases in education and property taxes to name a few.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would have liked to hear more so we could advise our seniors about those issues. Can you expand upon that answer, please?

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, thank you for that. We also have premium-free Blue Cross coverage that includes dental and optical assistance. We know that there is a housing issue that our government is also providing for and which I know that the minister of housing will help us answer later on when more questions come by. We also have a toll-free 1-800 seniors' information line which has answered, on average, a thousand questions per day. I'm glad to see that seniors are using that information line.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's great information to share. Given that MLAs all advocate on behalf of the seniors in their constituencies, we're hearing a lot of talk about creation of a seniors' advocate. Some are calling for this across the province. Again to the same minister: what are you doing with the consideration of creating a seniors' advocate within your department?

Mrs. Jablonski: Thanks again for that question. It's certainly an area that I'm interested in, and I'm willing to review and see if we can provide any answers for that. However, I believe that with our 1-800 information line, with all the MLAs who are there to advocate for their seniors, and with our Seniors Advisory Council in Alberta, that also listens and presents recommendations for seniors in Alberta, we're doing a good job of advocating for seniors within our department. But it is something that I will review and look at.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Agricultural Assistance

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The last few years have been extremely challenging for those involved in the livestock feeding sector. The hog industry has been particularly hard hit with the low U.S. dollar, the exchange rate, and higher input costs along with other factors that the industry has no control over. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. The question is: how effective have the recent farm recovery programs that the government has provided to the ag industry been?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly acknowledge that the situation in this industry is critical at this time. We know that the producers need both short-term and some long-term support. This includes continuing our critical opposition of the mandatory country-of-origin label in the U.S. Long-term we're

working directly with Alberta's livestock people to help them develop sustainable challenges for now and in the future. This fall we announced . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many producers have already left the industry, what plans do the minister or the industry working with the ministry have to make it more sustainable in the future?

2:40

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a federal program, of course. They're paying producers \$225 per hog to reduce the supply of swine breeding stock and help ease the transition of producers considering some other options. If this target is reached in Alberta, our hog industry will see a reduction of nearly 20,000 breeding hogs, which translates into 400,000 market hogs that would not go to market.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe what the minister was just talking about was a hog cull, and I'm wondering if that has any provincial implications or if that's federal.

Mr. Groeneveld: Yeah. As I said, it's a federal program, but Alberta pork producers, Mr. Speaker, committed that some good will come out of this situation. Right now government of Alberta staff are in discussions with Alberta Pork and the Western Hog Exchange and the food banks to help direct meat to needy Albertans. It is estimated that 600,000 pounds of meat is being targeted to help Albertans' needs through the local food banks.

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

Capital Region Municipal Planning

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Capital Region Board was formally created, enabling the 25 area municipalities to start working on developing a long-range planning document. This is a very important issue for my constituents. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister tell us why the Capital Region Board was created through regulation rather than through legislative amendments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. It is a very important initiative not only for his residents but also an important initiative for the capital region and for this government and Albertans. The pace of growth is very significant, \$88 billion of potential growth in the oil sector alone. We had to proceed as quickly as possible, and we needed to have regulation to do this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what will the capital region growth plan include, and what are the timelines for its development?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the capital region plan will include regional land-use planning, intermunicipal transit, the geographical information system, and housing. We expect Chairman Chris Sheard and the board to get to work right away.

Mr. Johnson: Can the minister tell us what the provincial government's involvement in the Capital Region Board will be from this point on, and will the provincial government be there to protect our local municipalities' autonomy if it's appropriate?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that the Capital Region Board is about co-ordination and planning although as minister I will have the authority to either reject or accept the plan. I want to emphasize that this plan will not take away from any municipal authority over local planning matters. To answer the question as well: yes, it will protect their autonomy. There will be no change in boundaries or identity of individual municipalities. It will not create a new level of government, and it will not create a new layer of taxation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, never ever in the history of the question period of the province of Alberta have there been 108 questions and answers.

In 30 seconds from now I will call upon the first of six members to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, six members will participate in Members' Statements today, and I'll recognize the hon. members in this order: first of all the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, then the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, then Airdrie-Chestermere, Edmonton-Rutherford, and Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Tartan Day

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize that Sunday, April 6, 2008, was Tartan Day. Tartan Day celebrates people of Scottish heritage. It brings attention to their accomplishments and contributions to sports, science, technology, and the economy of Alberta.

On April 6, 1320, the Declaration of Arbroath was signed, and thus Scotland was declared an independent and sovereign state. The declaration urged acceptance to the Pope not to take the English claim on Scotland seriously, and thus Scotland's freedom was recognized.

Here in Canada the Scottish influence on our democracy is clear. Alberta was settled by pioneering Scots like North West Mounted Police Colonel Macleod and Colonel Irvine. Also of Scottish descent were our first Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald, Alberta's first Premier, Alexander Rutherford, as were both the first mayors of Calgary and of Edmonton.

I hope all members will join me in paying a belated tribute to Tartan Day, celebrated on April 6, 2008.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Junior B Provincial Hockey Championships

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 3 to 6 the Three Hills and Trochu communities were the host sites of the Alberta junior B

provincial championships, where teams from Sherwood Park, Lloydminster, Cochrane, Vermilion, Beaumont, Calgary, and Peace River joined the Three Hills Thrashers to put on a display of exciting hockey for sold-out crowds of enthusiastic fans. The tournament was well organized by an army of local volunteers from the communities of Trochu and Three Hills.

In the final game the Three Hills Thrashers proved the gracious hosts, settling for the silver medal in a hard-fought battle with this year's champions, the Sherwood Park Knights, who took the gold with the final score of 8 to 3. I wish to congratulate the Sherwood Park Knights on their victory and wish them all the best as they move on to the western Canadian championship finals this weekend.

I'd also ask the Assembly to join me in congratulating all the teams for qualifying to compete in this provincial competition and to thank them for their display of sportsmanship and excellent hockey skills and the Three Hills and Trochu organizers and volunteers for hosting such a great event.

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

Sexual Orientation and Human Rights

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent days Albertans celebrated the 10th anniversary of the *Vriend* versus Alberta decision. After several years in provincial courts the Supreme Court of Canada at last ruled that the provincial government could not exclude gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered people from human rights legislation.

Delwin Vriend's struggle began in a very different world from the one we enjoy today. The current level of acceptance for various sexual orientations is far greater than that of the early 1990s. To stand up for a just but unpopular case required tremendous courage. The personal cost of standing up for yourself or for a minority group often far outweighs any benefit that an individual may gain. But perhaps we shouldn't be surprised by Vriend's outspoken determination; these are typical Albertan traits. Despite the challenges he faced – and there were many – Vriend proved that an individual citizen can bring about change if he or she shows the strength to act for the common good.

In this the 27th Alberta Legislature we have the opportunity to celebrate the power of the individual and to recognize the fundamental human rights of thousands of Albertans. This Legislature should act as quickly as possible and explicitly extend protection for sexual orientation to our human rights code. Doing so would ensure that Albertans facing discrimination will have explicit recourse in the legal system, but more importantly it will show that we as a society value each and every one of its members regardless of who or how those members choose to love.

Mr. Speaker, we are near the end of the first decade of the 21st century. It is long past the time for Alberta to join the other Canadian jurisdictions by explicitly recognizing and protecting civil rights of our gay, lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual citizens.

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

National Victims of Crime Awareness Week

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week marks the third annual National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. Any time a crime is committed, the name people most often read and hear about is the name of the offender rather than the name of the victim. As a result, victims often feel abandoned and helpless, especially as they enter the confusing and intimidating world of the criminal justice system.

2:50

The theme for victims of crime week this year is Finding the Way Together. It is a clear reminder that victims deserve to be heard and deserve to be treated with compassion and respect.

This government has already taken important steps to ensure that victims do not fall through the cracks. In March 2006 the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security launched a three-year campaign to let Albertans know there is someone they can call or programs they can access if they become a victim. Last year government unveiled the first step-by-step guide ever developed in Canada to help victims of crime through the criminal justice system. This guide is called the Victims of Crime Protocol. This month a special province-wide newspaper supplement created awareness and information about victim services for persons new to this province and this country.

But our support for victims does not end there, Mr. Speaker. We also ensure that victims who qualify receive financial benefits and that funding is available to organizations that support victims of crime. Over the past five years the number of programs supported by the victims of crime fund and the number of victims receiving financial benefits have consistently increased.

The government of Alberta believes victims of crime should be heard and has taken action to ensure that that is indeed the case. We will continue to develop programs and services that ensure that victims, like all Albertans, can live, work, and raise their families in safe and secure communities.

Thank you.

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

Kevin Martin Rink World Men's Curling Champions

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to recognize the world's best men's curling team, the rink led by Alberta's and Edmonton's very own Kevin Martin. This past Sunday Kevin Martin and his rink won the world men's curling championship in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Canada's 31st victory at the championship since 1959.

While this victory continues Canada's long run as the premier curling country in the world, this championship is especially sweet for Kevin. While long recognized as one of the world's elite curlers, Kevin had not yet won a world championship. Five times he represented the Maple Leaf in a championship: once at the world juniors, twice at the men's world championships, and twice at the Olympic Games. Five times he fell just short of his goal. But he was not to be denied on Sunday in the final against the Murdoch rink from Scotland. A victory celebration 22 years in the making was realized with a thrilling 6-3 win. It was definitely not an easy path as they had to overcome a heart-wrenching loss to the same Scottish team in the first playoff game.

Throughout his career and in this world championship game Kevin Martin and his team have demonstrated skill, perseverance, and a passion for excellence, all hallmark traits that make Alberta and Albertans so great.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating skip Kevin Martin, third John Morris, second Marc Kennedy, and lead Ben Hebert on their world championship victory. You have made Albertans and, if I might say, especially the citizens of Edmonton very, very proud.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose Kodiaks

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to report an event of some significance in my constituency last night. As all Albertans know, this is hockey playoff time, and despite the fact that some of us may have had our interest wane recently, some people are still interested in hockey at all levels, not just the NHL.

The Alberta Junior Hockey League has had its own battle of Alberta going, and it culminated in a game 7 win last night by the Camrose Kodiaks over the Fort McMurray Oil Barons to win the league championship. The Kodiaks now move on to play the B.C. champion Penticton Vees for the Doyle Cup, and the winner of that will play in the Royal Bank Cup, which is the national championship.

This is the second consecutive league championship for the Kodiaks, and in fact in their short 11 years of existence it's their fifth league championship. They've also won four Doyle Cups. They've won the silver medal twice at the Royal Bank Cup and the gold medal once. I would suggest that there's probably no organization or team in the country that could boast such an impressive record.

In addition to this wonderful team achievement, Kodiak forward Joe Colborne was picked as the playoff MVP. This is a young man with an over 90 per cent academic average who will be attending the University of Denver next year on a scholarship. He's very likely to go quite high in the upcoming NHL draft.

Sir, all of this speaks to the tradition of excellence that the coaches, players, management and, not the least, fans and community supporters have achieved. For all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you and my colleagues here will want to congratulate the Camrose Kodiaks as they now move on as Alberta's representative to prove yet again that Alberta is hockey's heartland.

Notices of Motions

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give oral notice that at the appropriate time I will rise and raise the following issue under Standing Order 30, the emergency debate provisions, that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the arbitrary government-sponsored changes to the standing orders of the Assembly which threaten the basic democratic principles, especially unanimous consent, of the opposition members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka as chair of the Legislative Offices Committee.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I would like to table five copies of the report of the Auditor General of Alberta dated April 2008. Copies of this report are being distributed to all members today.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table four copies today of the announcement this morning on an action plan for health care in Alberta so that all members can participate in discussions with all of the relevant information.

Thank you.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the report I'm tabling is the report that my predecessor released on February 19, 2008, as the third-quarter fiscal update. The publication and tabling of this report complies with section 9 of the Government Accountability Act. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table on behalf of those who cherish public health care in this province a notice, and this notice indicates that next week on April 23 at 12 noon there will be another meeting of concerned citizens to defend public health care on the steps of the Legislative Assembly. That's April 23 at 12 noon sharp.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter that was sent by a number of individuals. They are very concerned that Alberta's labour laws require significant change around first contract arbitration, bargaining rights, and replacement workers. These letters are from Nevena Mancheva, Pauline June, Bob Russell, Dale Chrapko, Kali Meckley, Dianne Joly, Amanda Dangis, Donnet Ogilvie, Rosalind Wright, and S. Kirk.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is Bridges That Unite. It's a pamphlet advertising a thought-provoking travelling exhibition that invites visitors to consider Canada's role in addressing the global challenges of the 21st century. I had a chance to witness this exposition at the Nickle Arts Museum at the University of Calgary on April 1, 2008. The Aga Khan Foundation of Canada is the sponsor of the event.

My second tabling is with regard to the upcoming weekend celebration of Seder, the Jewish Passover. I had an opportunity to attend a preview of the Seder event on April 9 at the Calgary Jewish Community Council Beth Tzedec synagogue in Calgary.

My last tabling is from the East Coulee Spring Festival, which is entering its second decade of celebration. The money raised for East Coulee went towards the museum and a restoration project of the Atlas mines. Among the many free performances that were donated were performances by Dale Ulan, a bass player from the bluegrass group Widow Maker, husband of an equally talented musician, Corry Ulan . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, with due respect there is opportunity for members' statements. We're now in tablings.

Mr. Chase: . . . Sandra Clemons, a singer and songwriter from Calgary; and Tim Hus, Alberta's working history balladeer.

3:00

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta PC's platform book. The document includes a number of promises on health care from which the government has since strayed.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I wish to table today the annual report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the period April 1, 2006, to March 31, 2007, which includes the financial report of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner as at March 31, 2007.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Snelgrove, President of the Treasury Board, response to order of the Assembly MR 4 asked for by Mr. Miller on May 28, 2007.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Blakett, Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, pursuant to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act the Alberta Foundation for the Arts annual reports for the years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 and the financial statements for the respective fiscal years; pursuant to the Historical Resources Act the historic resources fund annual reports for 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007 and the financial statements ended March 31 for those respective fiscal years; the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation annual reports for 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007 and the financial statements for the respective fiscal years; pursuant to the Wild Rose Foundation Act the Wild Rose Foundation annual reports for 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007 and the financial statements for the respective fiscal years.

Request for Emergency Debate

The Speaker: Hon. members, earlier in the Routine a submission was made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, when the hon. member gave notice of a Standing Order 30 application. For all hon. members, particularly new members, take a look at your Standing Orders and go to section 30.

We have an agenda scheduled for this afternoon. It was essentially planned by the Government House Leader, but there's always an opportunity for any individual hon. member to rise, with the process that it is, to basically say that the Assembly should waive this planned agenda for the afternoon and go to another order of business.

What we have now is a provision, if you look at Standing Order 30(2), that

the Member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he or she considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall . . . rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

What the hon. member will now do is make an argument with respect to urgent public importance to waive the agenda for the rest of the afternoon. The Speaker then may allow additional participants with respect to this matter. Usually in this case we'd be calling on a proponent of the government because it's being raised by the Official Opposition, and then we'd go forward with respect to this.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, arguments, please.

Temporary Standing Order Amendments

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'm wondering if the copies have reached the table yet. No? Okay. I did make arrangements for copies to be sent to the table. My apologies if they're not there yet. Maybe I could ask one of the pages to look at that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to stand and make an argument under Standing Order 30, as the Speaker has described. I'm requesting leave to adjourn the ordinary business of the House

to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, "the arbitrary government-sponsored changes to the standing orders of the Assembly which threaten the basic democratic principles, especially unanimous consent, of the opposition members."

The situation we have before us and the urgency that's before me today is when I look at the Order Paper, there, in fact, is the government motion on the Order Paper. This is the first opportunity that I've had to ask for special consideration for that, and if I don't raise it now, by tomorrow the standard expectation that I would raise it at the earliest possible opportunity will have passed. So I have to raise this issue now.

The issue I'm raising is one of process. There are a number of references that I would like to cite, specifically *Marleau and Montpetit* pages 584 and 585, also *Beauchesne* sections 387 through to 398. All of these are referencing urgency. Mr. Speaker, specifically 387 and 389 indicate the primary issue is the urgency of the debate, specifically whether there is opportunity for a debate under the rules and provisions of the House.

I contend that there is no opportunity to debate why these standing order changes are coming in through a government motion, which is decided by a majority vote, rather than through a report or a House leaders' agreement, which requires unanimous consent. What is contemplated here is that the majority government can impose its will upon the minority opposition with regard to the proceedings of the opposition. Put another way, the process by which all members have an ability to consent to the rules which limit them is being denied. The urgency is that the principle of agreement on how this House operates is at stake and the process by which that principle will be debated.

Mr. Speaker, I contend this is wrong. As citizens we agree to having laws in place and agree to allow police officers to enforce those laws upon us. The same principle applies to this Assembly. We must all agree to be governed by the standing orders. That opportunity is being stolen from us by government staging these changes to be done by a majority vote. Without a report to concur with or a House leaders' agreement to signal caucus's support, we face a situation where these new rules will literally be forced upon unwilling opposition members.

The fundamental concept of unanimous consent is subverted here. What does it say when we ask for unanimous consent for the leader of the third party to participate in certain events but do not seek it when imposing new rules upon all members? Why must we have a consistently practised procedural need for unanimous consent to revert to an order when that order's creation is not subject to that same unanimous consent?

The 2007 temporary standing orders did come before the House as two separate government motions, but, Mr. Speaker, they were preceded by a House leaders' agreement signed off by all three House leaders. That opportunity is not being offered here. Further, I note that the 2001 changes did come before the House as a government motion and, frankly, were rammed through. I argue that two wrongs do not make a right in this instance. There is an urgent need to discuss how this government is trying to impose on this House what it should only be able to impose upon its own caucus. This does not contribute to the business of the House being conducted in a consistent and predictable fashion by co-operative members.

I believe that we have met a number of the other tests. There was no mention of these changes in the standing orders that was contemplated in the government's campaign material nor was it in the legislative agenda that was released by a press release under the auspices of the Government House Leader. It was not included in the throne speech. What we have before us today is the notice of the

motion for the debate tomorrow, and I argue that we need to have the ability to argue against that.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the arguments, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, would you like to offer comment and participate?

Mr. Hancock: Only insofar, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member, in citing *Beauchesne's* 387, 389, clearly cites the reasons why her motion should not be taken before the House today. In order to adjourn the business of the House, the issue must be one of urgent public interest where the public will suffer if it's not given immediate attention. The more relevant test, of course, is that there's no other opportunity to deal with the matter.

3:10

As the hon. member has indicated, what we have right now is a notice of motion which indicates an intention to bring forward a motion at some point in time relative to a debate of House rules. Yes, she's accurate that we would contemplate that that might come forward tomorrow, which would then provide the time that's contemplated for debate of the issue. It's not urgent to debate it today because it's going to be debated tomorrow possibly, could be debated tomorrow or whenever the issue is brought before the House, and it will have no impact until it's brought before the House. So it will be debated in a timely fashion, before there's any impact.

With respect to the suggestion that one can only change the rules of the House or the purview of the House with unanimous consent, with all due respect, Mr. Speaker, that's absurd. We have a standing committee of the House which is specifically named the Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing. One presumes that if we have a committee of the House that can deal with the rules, then the House can deal with the rules.

I just fail to understand the issue that she's raised with respect to unanimous consent and certainly don't understand why it's urgent to debate it today if it's not going to have any import or impact until it's called and passed, and when it's called and passed, there'll be plenty of opportunity for debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm prepared to deal with this matter now unless there's strong argument by additional members that they need to participate in this matter.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This is urgent because we are asking to have the time to reconsider the procedures here. We are asking you to stand up, the very responsibility you cited that you have in an earlier ruling today, to protect a minority and restrain the improvidence and tyranny of a majority. The debate tomorrow will be a debate here, on the floor of the Assembly, where the majority dictates. What we are asking of you today is to allow a debate on whether this is proper procedure at all. In fact, what we are seeing play out today and tomorrow if we don't have this debate is a tyranny of the majority.

The tradition established through 2004 is that rather than a tyranny of the majority there is a negotiated agreement on the standing orders of this Assembly. We are looking for the opportunity, based on your wisdom and your own responsibilities as chair of this Assembly, for a negotiated rather than an imposed set of standing orders.

I appeal, Mr. Speaker, to your sense of responsibility, your sense

of tradition, and indeed your very own citing of parliamentary law earlier today. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there additional hon. members?

Well, one thing is very clear, that the chair is not to be drawn into the debates before the Assembly between members. The last submission suggested that the chair should actually get involved heavily in the debate. The chair is going to resist that and will not get involved in the debate and will not violate the tradition of hundreds of years of the role of the chair of Assemblies.

I have listened to the arguments put forward. Three members did participate. This is the first regular sitting day of the First Session, and it's the first opportunity for what we refer to as a Standing Order 30 application.

In addition to the opportunity for the chair to hear brief arguments, there also is a provision for the chair to make a decision to basically say: should the debate continue? If the chair rules in favour and says, "Should the debate continue?" then there's a required number of members who must stand up and support that. It must be 15 or more members who would do that in order to allow us to get to that particular situation. If there is an arrangement between five and 15 members, then a vote is taken.

The chair is prepared to rule on the request of whether or not it is in order. First of all, the application was received in the Speaker's office this morning at 10:38, so the requirement of providing at least two hours' notice to the Speaker has been met. The motion has been circulated now, I believe, to all members, but in the event that it has not been, the motion reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the arbitrary government-sponsored changes to the standing orders of the Assembly which threaten the basic democratic principles, especially unanimous consent, of the opposition members.

To be in order, Standing Order 30(7) requires that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." The chair refers members to pages 586, 588 of *Marleau and Montpetit's House of Commons Procedure and Practice* and *Beauchesne's* paragraph 390. One of the key elements in this is the urgency of the debate, which means: what other opportunity would there be for this matter to come forward before this House to debate? That's the key to this in terms of the urgency, and it is noted at pages 588, 592, 599 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* that an emergency debate application should not be used to debate items which, in a regular legislative program of the House of Commons, can come before it in other ways. You can substitute Alberta Legislative Assembly for that. While much of that discussion deals with legislation, the same principle applies here.

The chair would note that there is a notice of proposed amendments to the standing orders outlined in today's Order Paper. It's called Government Motion 8. What the chair does not know and has no way of knowing, despite the recent comments by the Government House Leader, is if this motion will ever come before the Assembly. It may be proposed. It may very well come before the Assembly tomorrow. It may not come before the Assembly tomorrow. It may never come before the Assembly. The chair does not definitively know this. So, on the one hand, the chair would be asked to make a decision on something that hasn't happened and may never happen. It could very well be the intent, and if it is the intent, the process would be the following.

Dr. Taft: Come on. Treat us like grownups.

The Speaker: Grow up.

It is on the Order Paper now. If this motion is moved – this motion must be moved by someone – there'll be ample opportunity for debate of that motion. All members will be allowed to participate if they choose to participate. All motions are amendable. There is provision within our rules for any amendment to be made to a motion, and then subsequent to that, at the conclusion of that all members will vote on it. The questions will be asked: "Would all members in favour of this say aye. Would all members opposed say no." Then if members aren't happy with that kind of a vote, they can stand, and there could be a recorded vote with respect to this. So there is a process. There is an opportunity.

There is nothing in any – any – documentation that I've been able to find, that any table officer associated with me has been able to find to support an argument that any changes to the standing orders required unanimous consent or that any House leaders' agreement requires unanimous consent. That is not a true reflection of the history, traditions, customs, practices, precedents to be found in any of the learned documents, in any of the parliaments that we're aware of.

So, hon. members, I do not find the request for leave to be in order, and the question will not be put.

Orders of the Day**Transmittal of Estimates**

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, 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 supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2008, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

3:20

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, when a second or subsequent set of estimates is to be tabled, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires that an amended fiscal plan be tabled. This amended fiscal plan has just been tabled by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. It provides the fiscal framework for additional and necessary spending. It also provides for additional savings by transferring funds into the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

In order to implement these arrangements before March 31 and before this House had reconvened, it was necessary to provide interim spending authority by special warrant. This was in accordance with section 6 of the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Subsequent to the release of the amended fiscal plan, the transfer for additional savings was lowered by \$185 million based on updated information. In effect, this warrant will be reduced by \$185 million and will be ratified by passing the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2008.

To this end I now wish to table the 2007-08 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. When passed, these estimates will authorize additional spending and savings of \$354 million and capital investment of \$95 million.

Government Motions

4. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly do resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under our rules this motion is not debatable, so I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 4 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:22 p.m.]

The Speaker: For all hon. members this means that there's an interlude now of 10 minutes. You've got a break for 10 minutes. We'll ring the bell calling you back, and then we will have a standing vote, a roll count vote.

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Fawcett	Marz
Allred	Forsyth	McFarland
Amery	Fritz	McQueen
Anderson	Goudreau	Mitzel
Benito	Griffiths	Morton
Berger	Groeneveld	Oberle
Bhullar	Hancock	Olson
Blackett	Hayden	Ouellette
Boutilier	Horner	Prins
Campbell	Jablonski	Redford
Cao	Jacobs	Snelgrove
Dallas	Johnson	Stevens
Denis	Klimchuk	Weadick
Doerksen	Knight	Woo-Paw
Drysdale	Leskiw	Xiao
Elniski	Lund	Zwozdesky
Evans		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Kang	Swann
Chase	Pastoor	Taft
Hehr		

Totals: For – 49 Against – 7

[Government Motion 4 carried]

5. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2007-08 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 18(1)(a) this motion is debatable. Are there any who wish to participate?

Shall I call on the hon. President of the Treasury Board to close the debate or just call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 5 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:36 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Goudreau	McQueen
Allred	Griffiths	Mitzel
Amery	Groeneveld	Morton
Benito	Hancock	Oberle
Berger	Hayden	Olson
Bhullar	Horner	Ouellette
Boutilier	Jablonski	Prins
Campbell	Jacobs	Quest
Cao	Johnson	Redford
Dallas	Klimchuk	Snelgrove
Denis	Knight	Stevens
Doerksen	Leskiw	Weadick
Drysdale	Liepert	Webber
Elniski	Lund	Woo-Paw
Evans	Marz	Xiao
Forsyth	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Kang	Swann
Chase	Pastoor	Taft
Hehr		
Totals:	For – 49	Against – 7

[Government Motion 5 carried]

6. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2007-08 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

3:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, this motion under Standing Order 61(9) is not debatable, so I will now ask the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 6 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:51 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Forsyth	Mitzel
Allred	Goudreau	Morton
Amery	Griffiths	Oberle
Anderson	Groeneveld	Olson
Berger	Hancock	Ouellette
Bhullar	Hayden	Prins
Boutilier	Horner	Quest
Campbell	Johnson	Redford
Cao	Klimchuk	Snelgrove
Dallas	Knight	Stevens

Denis	Leskiw	Weadick
Doerksen	Liepert	Webber
Drysdale	Lund	Woo-Paw
Elniski	Marz	Xiao
Evans	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Fawcett	McQueen	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Kang	Swann
Chase	Pastoor	Taft
Hehr		

Totals: For – 47 Against – 7

[Government Motion 6 carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mrs. Leskiw 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 Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

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

Mrs. Leskiw: [Remarks in Ukrainian]

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

It is a great honour to move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. As a member of the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake I would like to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for delivering the Speech from the Throne opening the First Session of the 27th Legislature and setting the tone of the Assembly as one of respect and cordiality.

I would like to thank the hon. Premier for allowing me to move the acceptance of the Speech from the Throne. As I interact with him more, I fully realize his determination to make Alberta a better place for our future generations. I am truly excited to be part of his team. The hon. Premier exhibits the leadership qualities which will enable him to transform his vision of the province into reality utilizing a clear, concise, and achievable plan to build our province for the future.

Mr. Speaker, I would next like to warmly welcome the new ministers in the government. I am confident that they will represent to the best of their ability the Premier's vision of Alberta. This cabinet in many ways represents a new era for Alberta. As I gaze over those chosen for ministerial portfolios, I see a true regional and cultural mosaic which exists within our great province. I wish you all the best of luck and remind you that your colleagues who sit as private members will assist and support you along the way.

For the last of my thanks I would like to acknowledge Ernie Isley, mayor of Bonnyville and former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for Bonnyville-Cold Lake; mayor Johnnie Doonanco of the village of Glendon; reeve Ed Rondeau of the municipal district of Bonnyville; and mayor Craig Copeland of the city of Cold Lake. Their leadership for the residents of our constituency and the input they provided me is truly priceless.

My vision. Mr. Speaker, I come from a humble background. Like the hon. Premier I, too, am proud to come from a Ukrainian heritage. In fact, I am both the first Ukrainian and the first woman to be

elected in Bonnyville-Cold Lake in this province's history. I do not take this responsibility lightly. I am determined to provide insights into the needs of my constituency, drawing on my heritage and my years of teaching experience and my unique understanding of my area, my home.

I come from a family of teachers, and though it may shock you, I myself have taught for 36 years and have called my constituency home for the last 33. I am proud of my teaching background. Teaching has provided me with a unique perspective on my community, engaging generations of children directly and experiencing the changes my community has undergone. It has allowed me to gather insights into the arising issues which face my constituency. I hope to contribute positively to help address the issues which face my constituents and Alberta as a whole.

The knowledge I've gained from 33 years of living in my constituency is priceless in this position. In my opinion, this is a necessary amount of time in order to understand my area's rich cultural diversity and unique needs. In Bonnyville-Cold Lake we have a flourishing First Nations population: the Kehewin First Nation, Frog Lake First Nation, Cold Lake First Nation, the Fishing Lake Métis settlement, and the Elizabeth Métis settlement. We have a distinct francophone community with two francophone schools. We have a large Ukrainian population and are the perogy capital of the world and house the world's largest perogy in the village of Glendon. We have a unique type of diversity with the presence of the military in our area. The military is an integral part of our community, and I thank them for protecting our way of life and contributing to the vibrant community atmosphere in Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency's diversity is a sign of the strong sense of community and opportunity that exists within our cities, towns, and villages. My family immigrated to our province with the hope that Alberta would allow them to live a high quality of life and provide a safe, secure atmosphere to raise a family. I believe that pull of opportunity remains today and has been constant since my family arrived here so many years ago. If anything, we are presented with more opportunities than we ever had before.

As the Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for Bonnyville-Cold Lake my vision for the future of my constituency in Alberta is one full of hope and success. Our prosperity combined with Albertans' determination will allow us to build a future for this province that will continue to place us among the most desirable places to live in the world. We have the ability to build an infrastructure needed for a high quality of life as well as providing means to sustain our prosperity for future generations, we have the integrity to keep our family farms productive and the determination to keep our parks beautiful and protected, and we have the ability to provide an education system which will create a future workforce of well-rounded individuals who will diversify our economy.

Health care delivery. We do indeed face many opportunities, and for us as a new government addressing the efficiency of our health care system should be a priority. Our current system is comparable with other provinces and jurisdictions, and with increased efficiency Albertans will be presented with health care second to none.

4:10

Our government has committed to eliminating health care premiums. This is a great start. We have provided rural constituencies like Bonnyville-Cold Lake access to a mobile MRI facility and have committed to furthering the overall effectiveness of the system, but we need to do more. Providing access to a renal dialysis facility, for example, would provide quality care in constituencies like Bonnyville-Cold Lake without forcing them to travel extended

distances for treatment. Further, Mr. Speaker, in Bonnyville-Cold Lake the cancer clinic, the orthopaedic surgery facility at the Bonnyville Health Centre provides world-class care for all members of our community.

The problem, though, is that modernization and expansion projects are needed, especially in Cold Lake, where the lack of space for a specialist is reducing the potential for service delivery. Therefore, we must work with our health regions to best address the modernization of Alberta health facilities and increase the number of skilled health care professionals, increasing the overall care for Albertans.

We should work towards providing quality care for our seniors within reasonable proximity to their community, their home. In my community health care service delivery is especially important to our seniors. I hope that as we increase efficiency in health care, the care of our seniors will remain a priority, that they will be given the option of accessing quality care within their communities and age in place if at all possible in their own home. Alberta's seniors have witnessed their surroundings transformed around them in the course of a lifetime. In my constituency the transformation the community has undertaken over the last 40 years is unbelievable. It has impacted all aspects of our lives.

Energy and infrastructure. In Bonnyville-Cold Lake these changes have been fuelled primarily by oil. Oil has become the economic powerhouse, so to speak, for our community. I have witnessed the area I have called home for over 33 years become one of the richest oil-producing areas in Canada. Our area has enjoyed the benefits of steam-assisted gravity drainage, heavy oil projects, conventional oil wells, and natural gas.

The spinoffs and related industries that are linked include numerous service companies which utilize our community as the base of their operation. Our area, as a result, is developing very quickly, and it is important that we continue to work to develop the proper infrastructure and community projects along the way. We have just finished building a \$21 million sports multiplex facility, the Centennial Centre, with an indoor field house, running track, and fitness centre. In our community there are also plans in place for a project of similar size, the energy centre, Portage College, the new Cold Lake high school, and a regional water system which taps into Cold Lake. We must continue to build on their successes.

Because of our energy wealth, our infrastructure and human resources recruitment efforts must keep moving forward. We lack workers throughout the area, adequate daycare spaces, and we have limited affordable housing for our new workers, our young families, and our seniors. Highway 55 between La Corey and Iron River also desperately needs widening. With the massive influx of new residents and workers in our area highway 55 is simply not efficient enough to carry the load. I am fully confident, though, that with the hon. Premier's leadership and the throne speech that His Honour the Lieutenant Governor delivered, these pressures will be overcome and fizzle into the past.

Alberta communities will continue to provide the unparalleled opportunities which have made this province so desirable to call home. I am confident that our roads, schools, hospitals, and other public infrastructure will meet the needs of our growing province and that our energy production will be sustainable. I am confident that my constituency will welcome immigrants and skilled workers from all across the world to our community to fill the gaps of our labour shortage. I am confident that our government will ensure that the most feasible and effective option for facilitating and stimulating the amount of affordable housing will be pursued.

Sustainability. Another opportunity for Alberta and for Bonnyville-Cold Lake is the furthering of our sustainable Alberta.

I am extremely pleased that the hon. Premier has made this a priority. We must ensure that the K to 12 education system continues to provide its world-class curriculum, that our universities provide the necessary tools to expand students' opportunities so that the Alberta economy can continue not only to grow but to grow as a well-balanced and diverse economy.

Sustainability also means building upon the industry that has got us to where we are today. I am, Mr. Speaker, referring to farming. Farming is a very important industry in Bonnyville-Cold Lake. Farmers are proud, hard-working Albertans whose industry experiences great turbulence and has modernized significantly since the founding of our province. I am confident that with the hon. Premier coming from a farming background himself, our government will work with farmers to ensure that their industry continues to play a vital role in Alberta as it has for so many years.

Sustainability also means ensuring that the beauty of our provincial parks remains the envy of the rest of Canada. Our parks should not only be preserved for beauty, though; rather, we should continue to pride ourselves in providing high-quality green space for Albertans to utilize through recreation and at the same time preserve habitats so that we may prosper and develop our province while living in concert with nature.

As I listened to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I could not help but get excited to be part of this new government, this new age. Alberta does face opportunities unlike anywhere else in Canada and even the world. We have opportunities, we have determination, and we have the leadership that will build the future for Alberta, and we're all proud of it. As I look forward to the First Session of the 27th Legislature, I thank the constituents of Bonnyville-Cold Lake for granting me the opportunity to represent them in the Legislature for these exciting times.

Thank you. Merci. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose to second the motion for consideration of His Honour's speech.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me congratulate you on once again assuming the position and being elected to the position of Speaker. You, sir, are an ambassador for Alberta values, and I salute you and I thank you.

It is a profound pleasure for me to stand today and second the Speech from the Throne. It is an honour to have been asked by the Premier. It is especially an honour because we are the government that has a vision that will take Alberta to new frontiers. This, sir, is a moment that I will forever cherish.

As the Member for Calgary-Montrose it will be an honour to serve the community in which I was born. I was born in Penbrooke in 1980, and I was born in a family of immigrants, a family of individuals that came to this country with not more than their dreams. I, like many of my constituents, am the product of the hard work and the determination of so many immigrants. I am the product of people that came to this country, leaving back a very comfortable life for a life of struggle, for a life of hard work, all so their future could have a better life.

My constituency is composed of Penbrooke, as I said, Abbeydale, Applewood, Marlborough Park, and Monterey Park. It is a very diverse area. It is diverse with respect to ethnic and religious backgrounds. It is diverse in socioeconomic conditions. Almost 32 per cent of my constituents are first-generation immigrants. These are folks that have come to this country with their dreams, just like my parents came.

4:20

Sir, we have come to this country, all of us. Some were born here, some families have been here for many generations, and others have just arrived, but the one common denominator is dreams. Everybody has come here with dreams. It is my hope and my pursuit to ensure that new Canadians fulfill their dreams for their families and for future generations to come, but it is also my hope and my pursuit that they engage in Alberta, they engage in Canada, and they take an active leadership position in this country to help shape the future of this province and this country.

Beyond the external diversity of my constituents there are great similarities. There are grandparents, there are parents, there are siblings, there are many children, all of whom want the same things in life. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that the young families in my constituency will be delighted to know that this government is working to create 14,000 new child care spaces in this province.

Calgary-Montrose is composed of hard-working people, people that do their part and expect the government to do the same. We have proved that we are sound fiscal managers of this province, and that is why we are able to get rid of health care premiums in a fiscally responsible manner. That is giving back to our constituents.

The many mothers and fathers who I spoke with during the campaign that spoke about and expressed their concerns about safety in Calgary-Montrose, that expressed their concerns about crime and growing violence: these folks will be pleased to know that we are working to ensure that we get a hundred new front-line police officers this year and 300 over the next three years.

Sir, the single mother from Calgary-Montrose that I met who works in a factory and has high hopes for her children to get a university education will take comfort in knowing that this government is committed to ensuring that we have a great postsecondary education system.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, this is very personal for me. That constituent is very similar to my mother. You see, my mother worked in a factory for many, many years. My mother worked in a factory for many years so that I could have opportunities that she never had. She had to leave school at a very young age in India because her mother passed away and she was left to raise her siblings. Upon coming to Canada, she's worked many jobs, two jobs at a time, whatever it took to ensure that I and my siblings had opportunities they were never given. So this, sir, is so personal for me, and I will do everything I can to encourage young people in my constituency to complete high school and to get a postsecondary education.

Mr. Speaker, as you may know, I've devoted much of my time to working with young people. I have found that what young people often need is a mentor, a positive role model, someone that believes in them, because as Marianne Williamson once said, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."

Sir, I had one such mentor, a humanitarian like none other: Bhai Jasbir Singh, a humanitarian in India who started health care initiatives, who started four hospitals where the rich went because it was the best treatment and the poor went because they could pay whatever they could afford. He was a testament to true service. It is easy for us to stand and say that we are public servants, but he received no salary for his public service. He received no benefits for his public service. In my pursuit I hope and I pray that I can just do an ounce of what he was able to do in his life.

Mr. Speaker, I see hope all around us. That hope we need to instill in our young people is all around us. The volunteers who give so tirelessly give us hope. The police officers and firefighters and EMS personnel that lay their lives on the line every single day give

us hope. The teachers who see potential in children that children don't see in themselves and in some cases potential that parents don't even see in children: that gives me hope. The nurses who take an extra minute to comfort a patient give me hope. The single mother who doesn't let the fatigue of a long day of work at home and outside of the home prevent her from reading to her children every night gives me hope.

Sir, the woman I met door-knocking who is raising her grandchildren because, as she put it, her daughter was not ready to grow up – this woman fought for legal custody of her grandchildren so that she could give them some opportunity, give them some hope – gives me hope. Now, the beautiful part of that is that we chatted for some 15 to 20 minutes at her doorstep, and I said: “You know, I applaud you. I applaud you for being so strong.” She said to me: “You know, most days I don't feel strong. Most days I actually feel quite weak, and some mornings I wake up thinking I don't know if I can carry on with this.” I wasn't quite sure what to say, but as I looked in her eyes, I could see the tears.

The answer was that she is stronger than most of us because in spite of fear, she acts. In spite of being terribly afraid, she acted. In spite of being terribly afraid for the future of her children, she acted. I applaud her for her strength and courage to take such a bold step. She is the sort of individual that gives me hope.

Yesterday's Speech from the Throne offers hope for the present, hope for the future, and hope for taking advantage of all that Alberta has to offer. The government is putting forward an ambitious plan that appeals to Albertans' wants and needs. This is a track that delivers on promises and offers an ever-increasing quality of life. My constituents are going to be pleased with the new ring road around Calgary because that's more time they get to spend at home instead of in traffic. By making it a priority to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of health care delivery and providing hospitals to meet the needs of a growing province, we are demonstrating, sir, that the government has the right plan for health care.

What gives me great pride to be an Albertan is the fact that one-quarter of new jobs created in this country are because of us. That is a profound thing. I am absolutely proud to be an Albertan, to contribute so much to this country. But that, sir, means that we must continue on a path of solid economic management and growth in innovation.

4:30

To ensure that we remain prosperous, the government is working on adding value to our exports and broadening our economy. As Canada's largest producer of wind power and petrochemicals our energy resources afford us much prosperity, but we must strive to be as entrepreneurial as possible and to make the most of our skills and innovation. Just today I learnt of some of the great innovations coming about because of our nanotechnology strategies. We will be a leader in this field by 2020. This is solid vision, this is true leadership shown by the Premier, and, sir, this will make sure we have a place in the international community forever.

There's one more story that I must share, and it's of a constituent I met during the campaign. My volunteer knocked on her door and said, you know: I'm here with your candidate. We heard some rustling, and after about a minute the door opened. I was shocked to see a young woman standing before me in tears. I said: “My apologies. I don't mean to interrupt you. You seem to be going through something.” She said: “No, I wanted to open the door for you. I've just lost somebody, but I still wanted to meet you.”

That moment touched me because it shows us the great position we are in. The people of this province and the people of Calgary-Montrose have entrusted us with such a position. We shall never

take this for granted. This shows me the importance of public life, something that we should remember when we take every action, something that we should consider every time we make a decision and have to consider whether it's a decision for greatness or if it's just a political move.

I want to inspire young people in my constituency. I want to inspire a generation of young people, and if I can inspire just one of them to get a postsecondary education, I will have done my job. In order to inspire young people, though, we need to ensure that instead of our young people feeling inadequate, we must instill in them the understanding that they have the seeds of greatness implanted in them. Instead of our young people feeling limited because of the financial means of their parents, we must express to them that they have unlimited potential and unlimited opportunity in our great province.

Instead of people seeing divisions and borders between people of different faiths and cultures, we must provide a venue for young people to experience human unity. Instead of our young people being marginalized by the way they dress, the music they listen to, or the one mistake they've made, we must accept them, we must love them, and we must give them a chance to change. Instead of teaching our young people to judge others, they must learn to bring out the best in others. Instead of young people feeling that beauty is based on shapes and sizes and that love is conditional, they must see and they must feel that they are beautiful and they are loved. Instead of our young people hearing that one person just can't do anything or witnessing prejudice and judgment, they must know that the ability to do great things, to uplift humanity, to serve, to prosper, to contribute, to live in harmony with fellow human beings is their potential.

The greatness of humanity, the greatness instilled in every human being, the greatness of serving is to be realized and developed. That is my hope, that is my dream, and that is why I am the MLA for Calgary-Montrose.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose has the distinction of being the second-youngest member serving in any parliament anywhere in the country of Canada today. He has one junior serving in the National Assembly of Quebec. That's it. Number 2 on the list.

The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal and Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and respond. I understand that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere has family here. I am prepared to switch places if he wants to go, and I'll follow him if that helps his family situation.

The Speaker: That's perfectly fine with me in terms of the rotation. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, please.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm both honoured and humbled today to rise on behalf of the constituents of Airdrie-Chestermere to address this Assembly in response to the Speech from the Throne.

By way of constituency background for my fellow members, the riding of Airdrie-Chestermere has seen remarkable growth over the past several years. In fact, Airdrie has been one of the fastest growing cities and Chestermere one of the fastest growing towns in all of Canada. Although there are many new faces, we also have fifth-generation Alberta families working the same lands that their great-grandparents did, although they use a little more horsepower than their forebears ever did.

Airdrie-Chestermere is truly a microcosm of Alberta, where rural meets urban and farmers and ranchers live next door to merchants and business executives. It is also one of the youngest constituencies in the province, where thousands of young couples come to start their families and find thereafter that they haven't the heart to leave what has become their new home.

Aside from giving my wholehearted support to this Speech from the Throne and providing some constituency background for my fellow members, I wish to spend the remainder of my remarks today sharing some of why I have sought to serve in this honourable office. And it is an honourable office, Mr. Speaker. Although the mainstream media and prevailing pop culture of the day often portray politics quite cynically, I humbly submit that the dedication of our lives to the service of our fellow man, to future generations, and to our democracy is the most noble undertaking that any of us will ever be involved in.

Mr. Speaker, I have never felt so grateful to have been born and to have lived in our great province than I do today. Our province, with its current prosperity and future possibilities, is the envy of this nation and perhaps the entire world. Although our abundant natural resources play a critical role in our present prosperity, the larger reasons for our success are found in the hard work, innovation, entrepreneurial spirit, and family-centred values of our fellow Albertans in combination with the effective policies of their political leaders. Under the leadership of Premier Stelmach and the current government I am sure that good governance in Alberta will continue into the foreseeable future.

Mr. Speaker, in the midst of such prosperity the temptation might exist to simply rest and enjoy the fruits of our labours. However, this Premier and this government understand what has brought Alberta to its present point of possibilities. We have arrived here because Albertans have never been a people satisfied with the status quo. Albertans and we their representatives understand that we have a duty to stand on the shoulders of those who laboured before us to create opportunities for our children that they would not otherwise be able to enjoy. It is this loyalty to the future of Alberta that has inspired Albertans to undertake great risks and to make difficult choices knowing full well that it may be future Albertans and not themselves that would benefit the most.

It was this selfless principle that inspired my great-grandparents to emigrate to Vermilion from Holland and toil as farmers through the Great Depression. It was this thought that motivated my great-uncle Tys Feenstra to sacrifice his life on the battlefields of Italy for his country and for his beloved Alberta. It was future generations on the mind of Premier Peter Lougheed when he courageously defended the economic interests of our province, and surely it was the same feeling of intergenerational responsibility that gave Premier Ralph Klein the fortitude to cut spending, cut taxes, balance budgets, and pay off a debt that would have limited the opportunities of our children.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, the names and faces have changed, but our responsibilities have not. We are here to lead Alberta into this new century, to make the tough decisions now that will create opportunities and choices for our children and grandchildren that we have not previously possessed. There are many areas where tough decisions must be made. For example, voter participation in the last election dropped to an historic low of about 40 per cent. Among young voters of my generation the turnout fell to the low 20s. There are many different reasons and justifications for this figure, but certainly all the members of this House can agree that we need to look at ways in which we can re-engage the 60 per cent of Albertans and the 80

per cent of my generation that did not vote into participating more fully in our democratic process.

If these Albertans didn't vote because they didn't understand the issues and our proposed solutions, we need to find ways to better communicate and share our messages. If these Albertans didn't vote because policy platforms were not relevant or important to them, we need to work with Albertans to develop more relevant and inspiring policies and ideas. If these Albertans didn't vote because they believe an MLA is merely their spokesperson to their constituency for their party, we need to change our democratic system to reflect the principle that an MLA's primary purpose is to be the voice of his or her constituents in government. If these Albertans didn't vote because they believe that their participation in the political process does not matter, we have to work with Albertans to develop ways in which they can feel and see that their involvement in our democracy does matter.

Altering the way in which we deliver democracy is undoubtedly complicated, but we as members of this Assembly owe it to our current and future generations to make sure that our democracy is among the strongest in Canada and in all the world. Until we reach that goal, we cannot be content with the status quo.

Another example where we need to alter our direction is in health care. We have a system that indeed has many strengths. However, it clearly is not sustainable or adequately accessible in its present form. Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that the majority of Albertans, particularly of my generation, are not concerned one bit about whether the health system conforms to some specific ideology. Albertans don't want more polemics; they simply want a system that is accessible when they need it, that is accountable to patients, not bureaucracy, and that is financially sustainable for our families and for our children's families. It's innovative action, not empty rhetoric, that Albertans want on this issue, and we the members of this House need to deliver.

Mr. Speaker, there are other difficult decisions to make if we are to strengthen Alberta's young and future families. I believe that the greatest strength of this province and its people is the importance that we have always placed on the family as the fundamental unit of our society. It has been statistically proven time and again that the most effective antidotes against crime, poverty, and other social ills are caring parents working together to build loving, safe, and financially stable homes where their children are able to learn and grow into contributing members of society.

As a province we must make the choices today with an eye to strengthening and protecting our families and children for the future. Part of this effort requires us to lessen the heavy financial burden inherent in raising a family so that parents not only feel financially free to have more children but also have a viable choice to invest more time with their children, rather than both parents being financially pressured to work excessively outside the home.

Parents also need more choices regarding the education of their children. Although for most parents our highly ranked public education system fulfills that role, Alberta must continue to lead the country and the world in expanding the amount of choice and resources we provide parents for educating their children.

We also need to invest more thought and resources in battling one of the most horrific evils of our day: that of child pornography, child abuse, and child trafficking. I am confident that every member of this Assembly can agree on that. These problems are international in scope, are the most despicable of all acts. It will require sustained government commitment, innovation, and collaboration to protect these innocent lives. I am committed to working together with my fellow members of this Assembly to see that such solutions are found and implemented.

The challenges facing this province are indeed great, but our opportunities and our potential are even greater. It is my intent to serve the people of Airdrie-Chestermere and the people of Alberta both present and future with all that I have and am. This is my commitment to you, Mr. Speaker, to Premier Stelmach, to my fellow members, and, most importantly, to this wonderful place and people we call Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere – and I think members cannot move when the Speaker is in the chair, and that includes the hon. Member for St. Albert – wonderful speech, but I have bad news. We have a standing order called Standing Order 29(2)(a), and when you become the third participant in the debate on the Speech from the Throne, there's a five-minute question-and-answer period that follows your speech time. Any member in the Assembly may now ask you any question.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to participate and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I was listening with a great deal of concentration to the comments that the member was making. I'm a little confused about the last issue he was bringing forward. I'm wondering if he could expand on that a bit.

Mr. Anderson: The issue of child pornography, child trafficking, all that sort of thing?

Ms Blakeman: Sure.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much. Well, that is obviously a very critical area that we're dealing with. I see a lot of this in my new position as parliamentary assistant for the Solicitor General. There are many different areas, many different things that we're looking at right now to address that issue. Obviously, there's been some talk about CyberPol and the new cybercrime units, that sort of thing, and we're looking very closely at those things, and we'll continue to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont in the question-and-answer period.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy for this House that I'm not the youngest lawyer here, especially after such a great speech from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I do have one question, sir. You spoke about reducing taxes, reducing the burden on families. Can you tell us how you honestly feel about our government's plan to eliminate the health care premiums?

Mr. Anderson: Well, it's an objectionable plan. No. I'm just joking.

It's a fantastic plan, obviously, that is going to greatly decrease the financial burden on our families to the tune of about \$1,200 a year or more. I wholeheartedly support the plan of the Premier on this.

The Speaker: Are there additional members who would like to participate? The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much. More of a comment than a question, Mr. Speaker. I just would like to welcome the hon. member to the Dutch caucus. There is a fee, of course, for joining the Dutch caucus, and we are expanding.

Mr. Anderson: Well, like all Dutchmen I'm too cheap to pay it.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Then it's my pleasure to introduce the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal and Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and respond to the throne speech that the Lieutenant Governor read yesterday and read so well. It's always a great event when the throne speech is delivered. I think we probably all enjoy the pomp and ceremony: the music, the uniforms, and so on. I think it adds an air of royalty, which it is intended to do, to this Legislature. It's always an honour to rise and respond.

I read the throne speech and listened. Certainly, there are some things that I appreciated, a handful of specifics. It was very short on specifics, though. I noted the gesture on fetal alcohol syndrome, for example, and I'm sure we'd all agree that addressing those kinds of issues is a priority. I wish the plan to eliminate health care premiums was accelerated, but I guess we'll see the details of that in the budget in a week or so. Hopefully, it's something that can be done very quickly.

4:50

In general – I'll be honest – I was disappointed. I've listened to a number of throne speeches now, and at a time when I would have enjoyed and appreciated a series of specifics, measurables, clear targets, a series of visionary statements, instead it felt to me and, I think, to most people who read it like it was written filled with vagueness, filled with jargon, and very short on specifics. This is, of course, the first throne speech for this new government. Congratulations to all of you on being elected.

I want to start my comments, though, observing how the government was elected and how we were all elected. I appreciated the comments from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere that there are serious problems with the electoral process, that when we have only 40 per cent – or perhaps it will turn out to be even 39 per cent once all the voters are counted – of eligible voters turning out, we've got a real problem. By all accounts this last election was the lowest voter turnout in the history of Canada in terms of all provincial elections since Confederation, and it is something that we all ought to be rightly concerned with.

It also sends another message to all of us that we stand here together, all 83 of us, representing less than half of the eligible voters of this province, that if we walk down the street and encounter 10 people, six of those people didn't vote for any of us. The majority of Albertans didn't vote for any of us, and I think it's important, in particular, for government members to remember that only 1 out of 5 eligible voters voted for this government.

Why do I say that it's particularly important for government members? Because government members, the way the system is set up in Alberta right now, get 100 per cent of the power, 100 per cent of the authority, which they are already exercising in this Assembly, through having only 20 per cent of Albertans support them. I think that puts a particular onus on this government to act with perspective, to act with restraint, to act with particular thoughtfulness, recognizing that the temptation to exercise the enormous power that you have should be tempered by remembering that only 2 out of 10 eligible voters supported you. I would ask you to consider that.

What would I have liked to have seen in the throne speech addressing this issue? Something that our caucus has advocated and something, I suspect, that a number of the government caucus members might support, certainly that other provinces have looked at. It would have been exciting to see in yesterday's throne speech

a commitment to a citizens' assembly on electoral reform, following the lead set some years ago in British Columbia, to look at issues such as proportional representation or other variations on how provincial governments are elected.

Canada is one of the last democracies in the developed world that functions on a first past the post voting system, that has no – no – proportional representation at all at the provincial level. It's not something we should be proud of. I know it's something that serves the governing party very well, and that's why it wasn't in the throne speech, but if we are here as servants of democracy, if we are here genuinely believing that the voice of the people needs to be heard, then I think we need to rise to the challenge and bring forward alternative ways of choosing governments.

We could follow the lead of the British Columbia government, which has pursued this and is serious enough about amending electoral processes that although in the referendum in the last general election the plebiscite didn't pass, they've actually brought it back for the upcoming general election. So that would have been something wonderful and exciting to see in the throne speech yesterday. It wasn't there.

I also would challenge the government to consider fixed election dates. We, all of us, of course, had the pleasures and joys of campaigning through a bitterly cold February. I'm sure all of us have stories about snow and ice and frostbite. I know people who broke bones falling on the ice. I'm sure all of us trudged more miles than we would have wanted to through the bitter cold. I think that was a factor in the low voter turnout. I think that we could honestly consider following the lead of quite a number of governments around this country now of establishing fixed election dates and establishing them at a time of year that actually invites people to get out. You know, maybe a June election or maybe a late-October election, whatever the date may be.

Let's ask ourselves seriously if we want to have a more vigorous democracy. If we want to have a larger voter turnout, then let's not call an election in the middle of winter. On the other hand, if that serves the particular agendas and strengths of one party, well, I guess we'll see that continue, but I would love to have seen in the throne speech a commitment to fixed election dates. There are lots of models for doing that now. Let's get on with it.

I'd also like to raise the question of how this election was actually administered. We were plagued with stories and accounts, well documented, of problems in the administration of this election, and we will be pursuing this issue in various ways. You know, all of us, I assume, are aware that the Elections Alberta website was down for a large part of election day, so the people who are now, in our modern society, accustomed to going to a website to get basic voting information found that the Elections Alberta website wasn't functioning. Of course, the accounts go on and on and on about breakdowns in the election administration.

I would have liked to see in the throne speech yesterday a commitment to a public inquiry into how this election was conducted so that we can learn – not to find fault but to learn – so that in the next general election we don't run into these same problems again, so we don't run into such drastic labour shortages and such extensive irregularities. For all of us here, protecting the integrity of the voting process is the most fundamental thing we could attend to because all of our credibility depends on people believing in the integrity of the voting process.

Those are some things on electoral reform that I would have liked to have seen in the throne speech that, sadly, weren't there. In fact, there was no mention of any of that.

Considering that this government sits with 100 per cent of the

power, supported by only 20 per cent of voters, and we as opposition only have 10 per cent of voters – I freely acknowledge that all of us together, as I said, have the support of well under half of Albertans – what's our challenge in this Legislature? Well, there are, of course, many, but one of the challenges the Alberta Liberal caucus will be pursuing is to give a voice to people who will otherwise be unheard. Too often the people of Alberta are not heard in this Assembly, and that's reflected in the fact that most Albertans didn't even vote.

Which people's voices are going unheard? Well, the list is long. To start with one that we would all agree on, I'm sure: the voices of aboriginal people. There is a handful, a small, small handful of First Nations and Métis people in this Assembly. Congratulations to them. I wish there were more. We know from our own experiences that the voices of First Nations people and Métis are not strong enough. We feel that in some basics.

5:00

I know that during the election campaign, Mr. Speaker, I was in Grande Cache, and I met with a number of representatives from First Nations groups in that area. Do you know what their biggest concern was? There's no safe drinking water in their community. They cannot drink the water in their community. This is not a reserve. This is in the constituency of one of the MLAs who is watching me right now, and I'm sure you know which group I'm speaking of. Those people need a voice, and I hope the new MLA for West Yellowhead will give them that voice. I know we will be. People like that need a voice. They need somebody in here saying: we need clean drinking water for our First Nations people and for our Métis people. How is it that in a province with the wealth of Alberta something as basic as clean drinking water can't be available to all citizens, at least to all communities?

Of course, there's the recent news from the Samson reserve near Hobbema: the drive-by shooting, the gang issues. That's an issue that all of us, I'm sure, are concerned about. We need to work on many aspects of that sort of problem, from abuse of alcohol and drugs to gang crime to gun control. Yes, gun control. We need to work with our First Nations people to make sure that those kinds of tragedies, which are so common, become a thing of the past. As well, of course, the voice of aboriginals living in our cities and towns needs to be heard. They present huge opportunities, but they also face challenges that most of us would never have faced: challenges of health, challenges of community, challenges even of racism. We need to be speaking up, all of us, and listening and acting for the First Nations people of Alberta. I can tell you this, Mr. Speaker: the Alberta Liberal caucus will step up for Alberta's First Nations and Métis.

What about other people whose voices aren't heard? Albertans with disabilities. This caucus for years has fought hard on issues of, for example, AISH. It's only after years and years of pressure that AISH benefits have started to rise, and I congratulate the government on that. But let's be honest. If you're severely handicapped, a thousand dollars a month isn't much to live on; it's pretty meagre. Sure, there are important benefits that come with that, but when rents are what they are, it's tough. It's tough living in Alberta if you've got a severe handicap. There are things that could be done, simple changes in administration of that program to show some flexibility so that people on AISH have a little bit better time of it. I'm sure there's not a single person in this Assembly who would change places with anybody on AISH. It's tough. It's tough. And you know that the Alberta Liberals and our caucus are going to step up for Albertans with disabilities.

What about other voices, other people who need a voice here?

Well, children. I was pleased today to hear in question period a number of questions from all sides of the Assembly addressing concerns about children. Child care is a priority for us. There is much talk about creating 14,000 new child care spaces. We will be holding this government to account to make sure that those get delivered, that it's not just an empty promise, that it actually occurs. We'll be challenging the government to make sure that those kinds of spaces are affordable and that the people who work in those spaces are fairly paid because right now in Alberta it's all too easy to make more money serving coffee and doughnuts than looking after our children. I think all of us need to check our values on that one because, obviously, children need to be a priority. The Alberta Liberal caucus is going to give a voice to people who care for our children.

We'll also give a voice – and we've already begun doing that through the comments earlier today from our new Member for Calgary-Buffalo – to gays and lesbians in this province. Alberta trails the country in recognizing those rights in our human rights legislation. There's no need for that. Why don't we step forward? Why don't we join the rest of the country in writing sexual orientation into our legislation? I mean, it is the law of the land, folks. It's the law of the land supported by most people in this country, most people in this province, held up by the courts. So let's get on with it. Alberta Liberals will be a voice for equal human rights on issues of sexual orientation.

We'll also be a voice for women. I'm pleased that we have more women in this Assembly than the last one. Our goal and perhaps the goal of all of us would be to have women as 50 per cent of MLAs in Alberta. It's a great goal for all of us to have. Maybe we should strike an all-party committee to work out a strategy to achieve that goal. That would have been exciting to have in the throne speech. No sign of that, and I think that's regrettable. When it comes to the participation of women in all aspects of society, whether it's in this Assembly or anywhere else, the Alberta Liberals will be giving a voice to those concerns.

I was surprised and disappointed that in the throne speech, although I'd welcome being corrected on this, I don't think there was a single mention of seniors. Maybe I'm wrong. I don't hear anybody correcting me, but I would welcome it if I'm wrong. Seniors, of course, have contributed so much to the development of Alberta. They're the people who vote in the largest numbers. They bring wisdom. They bring perspective. They bring the kind of toughness that some of our members have mentioned in earlier comments, and I mean that in the best way. They know how to survive. They know how to go through thick and thin. They know what it takes to get up each morning and overcome the odds.

I was surprised there's so little attention to seniors, whether it's something specific on, for example, a break on the education portion of property tax or any number of other possibilities to make the lives of seniors a little better. They are paying huge utility rates because of electricity deregulation. They're facing all kinds of challenges. Again, we'll be the voice. The Alberta Liberal caucus will be the voice for seniors in this Assembly.

Of course, there are always schools and education. I was in Toronto, Mr. Speaker, in late January, I guess. I met with the chief economist of one of the big banks, getting his sense on the future of Alberta. I was surprised when I asked him: what's your biggest concern about the future of Alberta? I thought he might say, "Oh, the threat from the rising global concern with greenhouse gases and the need for Alberta to adapt to a world that's at war on carbon," or I thought he might talk about the labour shortage or who knows what. You know what he said? He said that his single biggest concern about the future of Alberta was our very high high-school

dropout rate, that we have the worst high school completion rate in the country. Although it's improved in the last few years, it's still not much more than 70 per cent of people who enter grade 10 finish grade 12 in five years. The chief economist of one of Canada's big banks fingered that as the single biggest concern he has for Alberta's long-term future. I agree.

What are we setting ourselves up for when almost 30 per cent of our young people don't even get grade 12 in a world where, for example, in Korea 95 per cent of citizens have grade 12 by age 25? How are we going to compete? What's our future in a world economy based on knowledge when 30 per cent of our young people don't finish high school? It's a real challenge, and I saw precious little addressing that in the throne speech yesterday, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals will be a voice for better high school completion and better education across this province.

5:10

We'll also be a champion for postsecondary education, as those of you who have been here in previous sessions will know. There was some recognition of that in the throne speech. That's good. I think we have an opportunity in this province to do something genuinely spectacular with postsecondary education, and I worry that we have set the bar too low. I don't feel the energy and commitment, and I certainly don't see it in action on postsecondary education from this government. Again, I ask to be corrected on this.

A couple of years ago Bill 1, the flagship bill of the government, was the Access to the Future Act. That's great. Wonderful idea. In fact, I think the act provided for \$3 billion to be set aside as an endowment to support postsecondary education. We actually would have liked it to have been more, and we had a plan for that, but \$3 billion is a significant step. My understanding – and again I stand to be corrected – is that less than half of that \$3 billion has actually been committed. Again, I don't see the minister of advanced education or anyone else correcting me on that.

How is it – how is it – that we are to believe this year's throne speech when Bill 1, a high priority of a previous throne speech a couple of years ago, has just fallen by the wayside? How is it that we're expected and the people of Alberta are expected to think this government is serious about postsecondary education when their own access to the future bill languishes and when private funders who want to give money to postsecondary education on the basis of it being matched by the access to the future fund have stopped giving their money because it won't be matched because this government failed to act? Words are cheap; actions count. I see precious little action on that one, Mr. Speaker, and I'm disappointed. I'm not just disappointed as an MLA and Leader of the Opposition. I'm disappointed as an Albertan and a Canadian because education is the key to our future. The voice for that issue in this Legislature will be coming loud and clear from the Alberta Liberal caucus.

I was also surprised and a bit disappointed on the lack of environmental issues that were mentioned in the throne speech. I don't think the word "water" appears in there, yet water management is a top, top concern. Indeed, there's a sense that I picked up and that I know many others picked up immediately in the throne speech that's it all about pushing the economy forward and doing a minimum to protect the environment. Certainly, there are some steps in there. But I don't think anybody much outside of the members of this government caucus actually believes that the government's greenhouse gas emissions plan amounts to anything.

When this plan doesn't see a real reduction in greenhouse gas emissions for decades to come, it's falling short. When it doesn't even come close to what the federal government under Stephen Harper is doing, it's falling short. We need to address these issues:

greenhouse gas emissions, water, habitat, land use. I'm looking forward to some bold, progressive, decisive legislation proposed from the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development on land use because, my goodness, we all know it's needed. That's going to be tough. If it's good legislation, we'll back it up. We'll be there with you. But too often the environment has been overlooked by this government, Mr. Speaker. If it needs a voice, it'll find a voice. It'll find a voice in the Alberta Liberal caucus.

Health care. It's going to be exciting. I'm concerned when I hear some of the comments already from members that they're going to get drawn into gimmicks and dead ends and red herrings when, frankly, the solutions to many health care problems are pretty straightforward.

A month ago on a Monday evening about 7 o'clock I walked through the emergency ward of the Grey Nuns hospital in the south of Edmonton, a suburban hospital on a Monday evening at about 7 o'clock, and I was startled. The doors opened, and it was like a MASH unit from the moment you step inside. There are people in the waiting area under blankets, in wheelchairs. There's a person inside the nursing station hanging onto an IV drip pole. There are people on gurneys and stretchers through the entire emergency unit, and the ambulance bay is no longer used as an ambulance bay. It's filled with tents which are used to triage patients.

The person I was visiting actually had a broken femur, potentially deadly, one of the worst bones to break. He spent four days in the emergency unit. Now, why was that happening? There were actually beds around. They couldn't staff the beds because there aren't enough nurses. There's a long history to that, and I won't rub the government's nose in that. But there's an obvious solution here. It's not to privatize. It's not to start blaming the citizens of Alberta and saying: "You have to stop getting sick. No more broken legs, no more car accidents, no more emergencies."

The solution is to get way more aggressive on training nurses, on training doctors. I know there are plans, and I know the minister of advanced education has in his mandate letter goals laid out by the Premier that will increase by several hundred the number of RN graduates by the year 2012. That's not going to cut it. The average age of RNs in Alberta is approaching 50, likewise for doctors. Let's do some obvious things here, and I hope members of this government caucus will support that. Instead of taking the system apart, do the obvious things to fix it: train enough doctors, train enough nurses, train enough other health professionals. That and many other issues will get a voice from us, and I hope it will get a hearing from all the folks in this government.

There's a crowd that I've given voice to in this Assembly in previous years that's raised my passion immensely, and that's hungry children. Every school day in Alberta thousands of our children go to school hungry through no fault of their own. We're talking about children six and seven and eight years old. Maybe they're from a dysfunctional family. Maybe they're from a family where the parents aren't able to feed them because they're impoverished or they've got other issues or they're just too busy. The thing is: it's not the fault of those kids that they didn't get breakfast. The solution is not to say: well, get the parents to feed them. This is our problem, folks. At least, it ought to be. We ought to understand that when kids in Alberta are going to school hungry, it's a problem for all of us.

I think that lone among all provinces – I may be corrected on this as well – certainly if not the sole then one of the very few of all provinces, Alberta's provincial government doesn't commit one dime to school nutrition programs. It's entirely handed out to the school boards. Well, you know what? That's not good enough, and we will hold you to account. We will bring the voices of those

children and their families and the volunteers who feed them to this Assembly so that we can appeal to your power to do something about that problem.

I've travelled this province, and any number of our colleagues have volunteered with school nutrition programs, and we see what a difference it makes. But it shouldn't depend on the hit and miss of charity. If a child is hungry, we as MLAs should make sure that they get a meal.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many people who we will be speaking out for in this Assembly, people who I would have liked to have seen recognized in the throne speech. There will be other issues that we will raise as well, so it's not just a matter of a strong opposition being here to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.

It's also a matter of us providing checks and balances on some of the big issues, and there are no shortages of big issues: checks and balances on P3s. I was a bit surprised in February at a big event in Calgary. I was approached separately by a group of architects and a group of builders, and both of them said to me: you guys have got to stop this P3 business. They were referring specifically to the schools in Calgary being built by P3s. They said: "This is stupid. Schools that would have cost \$18 million are now costing the taxpayer \$23 million because the private developers are building millions of dollars in for risk financing." Well, why are we doing that? Why don't we learn the lesson that the city of Edmonton just learned again the other day on P3s with the recreation centre? They pulled the pin on it. Why don't we learn the lesson of the Calgary courthouse in this province when it was proposed as a P3 and they pulled the pin on it? Why are we following P3s? That's an issue we will be raising.

We'll be raising issues like highway 63, as we did already once today. We'll be raising issues around labour and labour shortages and the safety of workers. Most Albertans don't realize that every two weeks about five people in Alberta die through work-related injuries. Every two weeks about five people die in Alberta because of work-related injuries. Those are the kinds of issues we'll be raising as well.

5:20

We'll also speak up for small business because, wow, do we hear a lot of concerns from them. For the fourth quarter in a row the Canadian Federation of Independent Business forecast for small businesses indicates that pessimism is rising in Alberta, that small business owners in Alberta are actually feeling increasingly pessimistic, and who can blame them? Wages are through the roof. There's a shortage of workers. Utility costs are high. Construction costs are out of control. They're carrying the burden of an overheated economy, and they can't compete against big energy industries. So we'll give a voice to small business, too.

We'll bring checks and balances as much as we can to this Assembly. Those checks and balances – and I ask all of you to consider this – are a reason that we've been fighting hard today to be respected. If there is no voice for the opposition, if we are treated as an inconvenience to be steamrolled, then some of those checks and balances, which are needed in every Legislative Assembly, will be lost.

Fiscal policy, for example. We'll see a budget introduced next week, and I expect there'll be an increase in spending. I'm deeply concerned – and we've long been on the record on this – that we are spending in this province beyond our means. If you tally up all the government revenues in taxes and federal transfers and fees and premiums and everything else and then you tally up everything the government spends, there's a huge gap between the two. We're

spending far more than we bring in in sustainable funding. We're covering that gap by liquidating the natural capital of this province. We're covering that gap through royalties. It's unsustainable. It's setting us up for disaster.

If we look around the world, gosh, I saw today in the newspaper that the Norwegians are concerned because their petroleum fund has lost value. It's now down to a mere \$387 billion U.S. Norway produces about the same value in petroleum as Alberta. They started their fund in 1995 or so, and it's \$387 billion. Our heritage fund under this government is actually worth less in real terms than it was 20 years ago. Where's the money going, folks? This is our future. We won the lottery, and we're selling it off.

Dr. Morton: It went to Ottawa.

Dr. Taft: It didn't go to Ottawa. I want to challenge the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development on that. He's saying that the money went to Ottawa. Let it be clear: not one dime – not one dime – of royalties goes to Ottawa. It all goes through the hands of this government. Every dime of royalties is managed through the budgets of this Assembly. Where has it all gone? Where has it all gone? We'd all like to know. I'd love to see – and we've spent a lot of effort on this – a heritage fund with a real plan. Now, I could have got excited about a throne speech that said: we're going to build the heritage fund up by putting 30 per cent of royalties into that fund no matter how high it goes. We've worked with economists. We've worked with business leaders. It can be done if the political will is there. The political will is not there, and as an Albertan I regret it.

I also want to make people here, all members of the Assembly, know how out of control the spending of this government is. Per capita the government of Alberta spends about 35 per cent more than the government of Ontario and about 22 per cent more than the government of B.C. In fact, we're spending more than virtually any provincial government in this country. What are we getting for it? There are still dozens of neighbourhoods in Calgary alone without schools. There are roads that are deteriorating. There's health care that's in crisis. What are we getting for that? Precious little.

I had the guts and we had the guts as Liberals to say on the campaign trail that a core program review, a review of every single dollar this government spends, could have found 5 per cent, not 10 per cent, just 5 per cent. We think there's 5 per cent to be found in efficiencies, whether it's through P3s, through who knows what, if we put every program of this government under a review and say: "Do we need to do this? Do we do it better? Can we do it more efficiently? Can we combine it with a different program?" That's what an Alberta Liberal government would have done. We won't have that opportunity, I'm sure to everybody's pleasure on the other side. But that's what should be done, then, by this government. Why don't we follow the lead? It's a well-established approach to

government efficiency: a core program review. Maybe that idea will catch on.

I am also very concerned about managing the economy. So much of yesterday's throne speech seemed to be just about fuelling an overheated economy. I choose the word "overheated" very deliberately. If you're not in the petroleum sector these days, you're left behind, and we're seeing this now played out. Edmonton – what? – six weeks ago lost a significant high-tech head office, Intuit Canada. At tax time people might be using their software. It was based here. Boom, they've left the province. We also lost in this city the Dell call centre. Dell came here three or four years ago, created 900 or 1,500 jobs. They're gone. In fact, as I talk to almost anybody running a business outside of the petroleum sector, they're looking elsewhere. The Alberta advantage for most Albertans outside of the petroleum sector is diminishing, and instead of managing the economy wisely and with balance, we seem to be fuelling it more in ways that I'm concerned will actually narrow the economic base of this province and make it more difficult for the economy to sustain itself in the long run.

Mr. Speaker, time is passing. I will actually choose to wrap up now as the clock winds down. I have considerably more I'd like to say, but I understand the business of the House may proceed. We do wrap up at 5:30 today, don't we?

The Speaker: Yes.

Dr. Taft: I'd like to wrap up by reminding all of us that we are here with a responsibility to this entire province. You are going to find that we will work as an opposition with the government in a spirit of co-operation if we're treated with respect by the government. If things like the standing orders are brought forward without any genuine sense of negotiation or if other difficulties arise, you will find that every step of the way we will challenge. We are here recognizing that there is a role for an opposition, that there is a role that will make all of us better and all Albertans better if it's respected and supported and celebrated.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is time now to adjourn, at 5:30, but we do have kind of an issue here. It has to do with Standing Order 29(2)(a). Is the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition going to return at 8 o'clock to participate in the five-minute question and answer?

Dr. Taft: No, I'm not. I'd be prepared to take questions now.

The Speaker: No, we can't. We have to adjourn at 5:30 according to the standing orders. Well, we'll deal with this later. The House is now adjourned till 8 o'clock.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

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