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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.

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce a person who many of you will know and many of you won't have known. He's seated in the Speaker's gallery today, the former Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner and the current leader of the Wildrose Alliance Party, Mr. Paul Hinman. I would ask Paul to please rise, and let's give him a warm welcome.

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mr. Denis Ducharme, not only a friend but a former MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, who is sitting in your gallery today. Mr. Ducharme represented my home riding of Bonnyville-Cold Lake from March of 1997 to the most recent election. Mr. Ducharme has a long history of supporting Progressive Conservative causes and while in office served as government caucus whip, chair of the Francophone Secretariat, co-chair of the Alberta Energy Research Institute, deputy chair of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and as the deputy chairman of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. While serving, Mr. Ducharme was also a member of the Standing Policy Committee on Health and Community Living. I ask Mr. Ducharme to rise and receive the traditional welcome to this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the House the students from Susa Creek school in Grande Cache. These students took a whole day yesterday to get down here from Grande Cache to attend the School at the Legislature program. They're in the gallery behind me. They're joined by their teacher, Mrs. Joanne D'Lugos, and their principal, Mark McGimpsey, and special assistant Mrs. Margaret Anne McGean. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House one of my neighbours, who is a very successful businessman. He was one of the first people to get into the early

windmill business and had a successful windmill business back in the '70s. He is now chairman of North West Upgrading and has very kindly joined us here. If you could all join me in welcoming Ian MacGregor.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Dr. Tracy Edwards, president of Lethbridge College. Lethbridge College is celebrating this year its 50th anniversary and will have homecoming in May. We'd invite all of the former grads to attend. I would ask that we give Dr. Edwards our traditional warm greetings of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you two wonderful individuals from central Alberta who over the years have contributed greatly with service in municipal government and volunteering and working very hard to improve their communities. I would like them to stand and be recognized: Earl and Dorothy Marshall.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests seated in the members' gallery: Marguerite Trussler and Gerry McLennan. Ms Trussler is the chair of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, and Mr. McLennan is the CEO. We feel very fortunate to have these two people at the helm of this great organization. With your permission I would ask Ms Trussler and Mr. McLennan to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two go-getters from two different areas. One is from Sherwood Park, and he is a provincial vice-president for the Métis Nation of Alberta, Mr. Trevor Gladue. The other, of course, is Mr. Tim Collins, who is the vice-president of region 4 in Edmonton. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Remarks in Tagalog]

Good afternoon. [As submitted]

It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of nine Filipino nurses. These nine nurses are accompanied by two members from Capital health, two members from NorQuest College, and one member from the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta.

These nine nurses are part of a contingent of over 600 nurses from the Philippines who accepted employment offers in Alberta. The arrival of the 600 nurses is due to the hard work and dedication shown by NorQuest and the college for facilitating the recruitment

of the nurses from the Philippines. The nurses will be employed initially as either health care aides or LPNs and would progress to LPN and/or RN status. Capital health will second these nurses to three continuing care sites to address our significant need in the community for nurses. Capital health along with the Filipino Nurses Association of Alberta will provide arrival support, community transition and accommodation to ensure the move is effortless for these nurses.

These individuals have travelled a great distance to reach our wonderful province. I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of our Assembly. Thank you. [Remarks in Tagalog]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre, I would like to introduce to you and through to this esteemed Assembly 11 members of NorQuest College and their group leader, Gerry Russo. If the members from NorQuest College could please stand and receive the recognition of the Assembly.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two great citizens in the province of Alberta: Mr. Rick LeLacheur and Joan Forge. As you know, Mr. LeLacheur supplies a lot of entertainment to the province of Alberta through the great team of the Edmonton Eskimos as their president, and Joan Forge runs a communications business and does great work for everyone in Alberta. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Red Deer Festival of the Performing Arts

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the 45th annual Red Deer Festival of the Performing Arts. The festival is being held from April 21 to 26 at the Red Deer College Arts Centre and the CrossRoads Church. This festival was founded in 1964 by Dr. Stu Fleming and the Kiwanis Club of Red Deer to promote the growth and development of music and the arts for our youth in central Alberta. To this day the annual Red Deer Festival of Performing Arts continues to grow in popularity and provides aspiring amateur musicians and voice students in central Alberta with an opportunity to showcase and develop their talents in a competitive environment.

1:40

The arts festival is now one of the largest provincial competitive classical music festivals in Alberta for five- to 25-year-olds. It boasts over 6,000 participants and 1,100 performances. Students compete in a number of musical disciplines. The event has come a long way since its inception and has not only brought young central Alberta musicians together but also the Red Deer community that hosts and attends the event. The festival's events are open to the public, and I would encourage everyone to attend any of the sessions at this exciting Red Deer tradition. It is an honour to have many of these talented young musicians and vocalists reside in my constituency, and I look forward to watching their skills grow in the years to come.

I would like all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the outstanding accomplishments of the participants and

volunteers of the 45th annual Red Deer Festival of the Performing Arts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Trevor Gladue

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Felix Adler said, "The hero is one who kindles a great light in the world, who sets up blazing torches in the dark streets of life for men to see by." Today I am pleased to recognize a hero who received the men of honour award on Friday, April 18, given by the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton, otherwise known as PAAFE, and Friends of PAAFE, and who exemplifies that quote, Mr. Trevor Gladue.

The PAAFE is a collaboration of concerned individuals and groups working towards long-term solutions to the complex issues central to prostitution. Men of honour are those who act in meaningful ways to foster respect, encourage healthy relationships, and create positive opportunities for people. In other words, they set up the torch for all people. Men of honour strengthen their families, communities, and workplaces and respect the integrity, individuality, and humanity of vulnerable children and adults.

Mr. Gladue has served as an elected official with the Métis Nation of Alberta for the last 12 years and is currently the provincial vice-president. He is also chairman of the Northern Lakes College board of governors and chair of the Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes.

I have known him since he was a young man in Slave Lake and have watched him grow in his beliefs and the aspirations of not only the Métis but everyone. Unfortunately, he moved to Sherwood Park.

As an aboriginal role model he has demonstrated what it takes to give of his time and energy to create positive outcomes while appreciating the wisdom of elders. I would like to commend Mr. Gladue for his perseverance and determination in achieving personal goals and his active participation in spiritual and cultural traditions.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating Mr. Trevor Gladue on receiving the men of honour award.

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

Environmental Responsibility

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With a mixture of foreboding and hope I greet my fellow MLAs on this, the 39th annual Earth Day celebration. Truly these are dangerous times as we witness climate chaos, ice cap melting, worsening food and water shortages around the world.

In 1939 we confronted a different global threat in the Second World War and rose to the occasion with all the human and material resources we could muster. Today we need to take the climate crisis with a similar resolve and courage, as we face a collective way of life that selfishly violates our own biosphere and future generations.

This is our time, and it is not our time. We recollect our absolute dependence on the earth for everything. We confront unparalleled opportunities as well as our unhealthy addiction to growth and must acknowledge our collective need for healing. We need reminders of the consistent overreach of past civilizations and that we borrow this time from our children. First Nations planned for seven generations ahead. Chief Seattle said: this we know; the earth does not belong to us. Humanity belongs to the earth. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

We continue to bow to the whims of the markets, markets not noted for either foresight or morality. What is government for if not to balance environmental and human values with economic development? We justify this free-market fundamentalism through our antiquated measure of progress, the GDP. Genuine progress, on the other hand, requires genuine courageous leadership to ensure that we have good scientific grounds for decisions or else follow the precautionary principle.

As in 1939 we see new storm clouds gathering. Climate chaos is the wake-up call of our century and the supreme market failure. We need to mobilize all possible resolve and resources across all parties. As one of the largest consumers per capita on the planet we must work together to address our debt to future generations with bold decisions based not on markets but stewardship. No, this is not our time; it belongs to our grandchildren and children.

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

Jack Maguire

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was my honour and privilege to attend Mr. Jack Maguire's 90th birthday celebration at the Allen Gray continuing care centre in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie on April 19. His wife, Doreen Maguire, was an incredible hostess.

Mr. Jack Maguire was born on April 19, 1918. He was a pioneer in the fur trade and began his work at the age of 17. He worked for the Hudson's Bay Company as a fur trader and buyer on the Arctic coast and the Northwest Territories as well as in British Columbia. He then moved to Prince George and currently resides here in Edmonton. Mr. Maguire had a way with nature. He was an expert canoeist and enjoyed golf. As we celebrated with him, I noticed that he is extremely perceptive as I enjoyed his wonderful sense of humour.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to honour Mr. Maguire here today as one who represents the foundation of our Canadian heritage as he helped to shape this great country. I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating Mr. Maguire on his 90th birthday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Energy Conservation

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we have heard, today is Earth Day, and it is very fitting that Alberta's third Environment Conference is happening right now at the Shaw Conference Centre.

The Alberta government makes a commitment to sustaining the environment and conserving energy on a daily basis. Over 10 years ago a formal program was initiated to reduce our environmental footprint from government operations and has reduced our electricity consumption by approximately 10 per cent. Since January 2005 more than 90 per cent of the electricity used by the Alberta government has come from green power sources such as wind power and biomass, cutting down our greenhouse gas emissions by 220,000 tonnes annually.

We have been leaders in waste management with the implementation of such initiatives as Alberta's first electronic recycling program. Our environmental waste strategy identifies the actions needed to help Alberta advance innovative approaches to waste management, recycling, and resource recovery both now and in the future to reduce waste disposal. On April 1 of this year the new paint stewardship program was introduced to better manage our

leftover and waste paints. These are just a few examples, Mr. Speaker, of what we as a government are doing to minimize our impact on the environment.

Protecting and conserving the environment is not all about huge government initiatives. We can take personal responsibility to help achieve our waste disposal targets. Mr. Speaker, we should treat every day as Earth Day by being more conscious of our environment and by discussing ideas to conserve our resources.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Economic Development in Lethbridge

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak to this House about a success story from my hometown that I believe is a perfect example of what has come to be known as the Alberta advantage. Back in January Braman Furniture, a manufacturing company employing 140 people, announced that it would close its Lethbridge plant for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the high Canadian dollar.

Now, I believe we can all remember a time when news like this would have been devastating not only for the folks who lost their jobs but for the community as a whole. But that's not the case now. Within days of the announcement Economic Development Lethbridge, partnering with Alberta Employment and Immigration and Teamworks training, stepped up and helped all of the affected employees find new jobs. Twenty local businesses took part in a mini job fair to take advantage of the fact that there were 140 workers on the market. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that 95 per cent of Braman's former employees have found new jobs in Lethbridge.

I believe this situation is yet another example of the incredible engine that is Alberta's economy. I also believe it's a reminder to this Chamber that keeping our economy strong and dynamic is of utmost importance to Albertans. By building on this success with partnerships with Alberta Employment and Immigration, Economic Development Lethbridge, and Teamworks training, we have had great success in Lethbridge.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Before we go to the question period, happy happy birthday to the hon. Member for Little Bow, who is celebrating, I think it is, number 6-0.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Nuclear Power

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both the nuclear lobby and top Tory insiders are already backing a nuclear power plant in the constituency of Peace River. At the same time, we have a Minister of Environment who in this very Chamber on May 29, 2007, said, "It's not the role of Alberta Environment to advocate on behalf of the environment." You wonder what his job is, then. The deck is already stacked in favour of a nuclear power plant, and this government is part of the shuffle. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Given that nuclear power plants draw huge amounts of water for cooling, why doesn't the government's Water for Life strategy consider the impact of nuclear power on Alberta's strained water resources?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Water for Life strategy doesn't deal with specific applications of water. It doesn't deal with specific industries. It deals with putting in place the tools that we need to manage our water on an outgoing basis. As the member knows perfectly well, the hearing process for the approval of a nuclear power plant is a very long one, and we'll have plenty of opportunities to engage in that conversation as the process goes forward.

Dr. Taft: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: will the radioactive waste from this plant be stored in Alberta, a risk to Albertans, or will it be shipped out of Alberta, a risk to Albertans?

Mr. Renner: Well, I think that's a very good question that the member should be asking during the hearing process that is part of any regulatory review.

Dr. Taft: To the same minister: given that there are much more environmentally responsible ways to address electricity shortages, including better efficiency and solar and wind power, will this government focus first and foremost on renewable energy and improved efficiency, turn its back on the nuclear lobby, and leave nuclear power as a last resort?

Mr. Renner: Well, not to duplicate what has already been said in this House, but I need to remind the Leader of the Opposition of the words spoken by the Minister of Energy, who in fact is responsible for the development of power: this government neither supports nor does it oppose the application that is before us. We will let the process proceed, and we will deal with the issues that come out of that process appropriately.

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

Oil Sands Development

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The manner of tar sands development continues to provoke both national and international outrage. Even the U.S. government has passed an energy bill excluding its military and government fleet from using fuel that produces more emissions than conventional oil. This government is through its mismanagement threatening the very industry it most prizes. To the Energy Minister: does he believe the market is the best at managing our tar sands development?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, initially I guess my answer to the question would be that there's been a bit of a misnomer used in most of the preamble with respect to the question. In Alberta we're developing oil sands, and I think that all Albertans understand that. It's odd that the member opposite doesn't understand that. Nevertheless, there is – there is – internationally and certainly in our neighbour to the south a low-carbon fuel standard initiative, and we're prepared to deal with that in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Environment minister. Two recent federal decisions on the Kearl tar sands decisions have forced tar sands developments on hold due to environmental concerns. Why is it falling to the federal Environment minister to manage this resource in a safe manner?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are certain jurisdictions that

fall within the realm of the provincial government. There are other areas that fall legitimately within the realm of the federal government. We do our very best to try and co-ordinate those responsibilities to ensure that we don't have duplicative hearings. In this particular case the federal court mandated that the hearing that took place, the dual hearing, the federal-provincial hearing, did not deal with some outstanding federal issues, and we have a decision that's based upon that court decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Sustainable Resource Development minister. With about 70 per cent of the Wood Buffalo region already leased, the cumulative effects management association in January called for protective green zones elsewhere. The minister is quoted as saying that he's reviewing the situation. We cannot sustain some of our boreal forests and dependent species. What exactly is his department sustaining in Sustainable Resource Development?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should state the facts accurately with respect to CEMA. In January there was a letter from some members of CEMA making a nonconsensus recommendation. There has not yet been a report. This government, of course, being responsible, is waiting for the final report, will act on the whole set of recommendations that come from that committee.

Thank you.

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

Water Management

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's increasingly clear that our water is being mismanaged. This was highlighted in the national report released recently called Fight to the Last Drop on the growing conflict over water in southern Alberta. More evidence: \$85 million to settle a lawsuit over water with the Western irrigation district, a legal challenge announced this week from two First Nations bands, contention last year over the Balzac mall racetrack, and finally Eastern irrigation district's application for selling unused water licences for purposes other than irrigation. A perfect storm is brewing.

The Speaker: Can we get a question, please.

Dr. Swann: To the Environment minister: how much longer must Albertans wait to have clear and fair rules on new water allocations to ensure protection of our most vital values?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta takes very seriously its responsibility to manage our water resources in a responsible manner, but I have to point out to the member that it's probably more of a truism today than it was back in the 1800s when it was first coined by Mark Twain, "Whiskey is for drinking; water is for fighting over." It is not going to go away quickly. That doesn't undermine the necessity for us to deal with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that a government report released from AMEC Earth & Environmental in late '07 stated that the government cannot make valid decisions on water

allocations or adequately plan because it lacks current, reliable information on actual water use, what assurances do Albertans have that this minister can protect our water? Are we supposed to take his word?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to participate in one of many such opportunities this morning when the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance announced that it is initiating its total evaluation of existing data with respect to the state of the watershed to identify what data is available, what data is known, and whether there are any gaps that need to be put in place so that we can do just what the member is suggesting needs to be done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that water is a public resource and is not owned by the irrigation districts, will the minister convene a public review of water allocation with a view to ensuring that it is transparent and fair in protecting our primary values of human need and ecosystem preservation.

Mr. Renner: The government is involved in the implementation of the Water for Life strategy. The development of that strategy has been a very public involvement, and a broad base of stakeholders have contributed and will continue to contribute to the development and implementation of that strategy.

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

Royalty Revenues

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the price of oil reached \$117 a barrel, and at those rates the state of Alaska will get \$14 per barrel more than Alberta will get. If we implemented a comparable system, today's budget would include an additional \$5.2 billion in royalties for this year alone. My question is to the minister. Will the minister explain what public policy objective is achieved by allowing those oil companies to keep the \$5.2 billion instead of bringing it back to the owners of the resource, the people of Alberta.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to point out to the member opposite that the fact of the matter is that today oil is trading for \$119.60, so we've passed the \$117 mark. With respect to what happens in the collection of royalties, we have in place a new royalty framework. The IT and the staff are being put in place to implement that strategy, and in fact it will be done in January 2009. In the meantime we deal with the system we have in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister admitted that producers will get 60 per cent of the value above \$120 a barrel. The question I have for the minister is why the producers will receive 60 per cent of the additional value of the oil above \$120 a barrel and only 40 per cent will come to the owners of the resource. What is the point of that, Mr. Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I think we should clarify this. I probably do have *Hansard* here someplace, but I don't recall saying anything about 60 per cent yesterday. So whatever the member is putting in my mouth is interesting, but I don't think I said anything about 60 per cent. I did allude to the fact that if – if – the price and productivity curves put us in a place where we were collecting 40 per cent at \$120, we would still collect 40 per cent at \$130. The income to the province of Alberta increases consistently with the increase of price.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the majority of the additional value flows to the producers and not to the owners and given that media reports indicate that EnCana doubled its quarterly dividend because they have to do something with their excess money, will the minister acknowledge that the benefits from our resources are flowing into corporate boardrooms and not into the living rooms of Albertans?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how much oil is flowing into the living rooms of Albertans on the average, but I hope it's not a heck of a lot. The other point is that unfortunately I don't have any EnCana shares, so I'm not getting any of those dividends. Again, let's make it very clear that under the new royalty framework we have in place, we can reach a maximum of a 50 per cent level, which would indicate that if price and productivity indicate that we're at a 50 per cent level, we would split the revenue received by the companies 50-50, not 60-40.

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

Anthony Henday Ring Road

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The construction of the Anthony Henday Drive is a very important project and a high priority for the constituents in the capital region. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. When can we expect construction to begin on the north section of the Anthony Henday Drive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We expect construction on the next section of the Edmonton ring road to begin late this summer or early this fall. It should be completed and open to traffic by 2011. The three proponents of the P3 project are in the last stages of putting together their bids and submitting their bid prices. We'll look over those bids very carefully and choose the one that gives taxpayers their best value. I look forward to announcing the successful bidder later this summer so that construction can begin as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Will the minister ensure that the north section of the Anthony Henday Drive will not have the same problem it does now in the west end?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that there will be no traffic lights on the next section of the Anthony Henday Drive. We will build eight interchanges, five flyovers, and a total of 27 bridge

structures. The roadway will extend 21 kilometres from the Yellowhead Trail on the west side of the city to the Manning freeway, and this entire section of the ring road will be free flow.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. When will the province complete the final section of the Anthony Henday Drive in the northeast from the Manning freeway across the river to the Yellowhead highway on the east of the city?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The province has set the goal of completing both the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads by 2015. We have already done some of the preliminary work to map out the best route for the river crossing. At this point we are still very much in the planning stage, but I can assure the hon. member that we do intend to move ahead as soon as we reasonably can.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Calgary Water Supply

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary has a growing population and a limited water supply. More than a million Calgarians rely on the Bow River watershed for safe, secure supplies of drinking water. It's the only source we've got. To the Minister of Environment: will the minister take a page from New York City and the greater Vancouver area's playbooks and commit to protecting Calgary's watershed by buying private lands, buying conservation easements on private land, and buying back forestry management agreements?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that such action would be necessary. We have under way a very worthwhile public discussion that involves land use and the land-use framework. Part of that discussion is: how do we protect the watershed for much of our population? I would suggest that questions with respect to land use should be referred to the minister that is responsible for land use, that being the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Taylor: No sooner said than done. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: given that their environmental integrity is critical to protecting Calgary's water supply, will the minister suspend all new oil and gas licences in the eastern slopes until his land-use plan is implemented?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, you'd think the hon. member, being a former member of the media, might pay attention to what happens in the Calgary area. Of course, the new Glenbow Ranch park between Cochrane and Calgary, the entire north bank of the Bow River, has already been secured for public purposes thanks to this government. In terms of the watershed management plan, we have different groups on the Elbow, the Bow, all the tributaries to the Bow, and our forestry department, the FMA, has not one but two water hydrologists. Every FMA, every annual marketing, every annual cut plan, has to pass a hydrology report. We lead the country in that respect.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former member of the media I do remember that when people gave me answers to questions I hadn't asked, I thanked them for the answer but asked them if they would answer the question that I asked. So I will put this to the minister again. Will the minister suspend all new oil and gas licences in the eastern slopes until his land-use plan is implemented? That's the question I want answered.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I think there was a show on Broadway once called *Stop the World – I Want to Get Off*. I'm sure the Liberals must feel that way these days, but that is not the way the real world works. Life goes on day to day, week to week, month to month.

We have a draft of the land-use framework, which is shortly forthcoming and addresses all of these issues. In this province we do oil and gas; we do wheat and cattle. We're going to continue to do them. The question is: do we do it in an environmentally responsible and sustainable way? And the answer is yes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Agriculture and Food Industry Competitiveness

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are involved in agriculture, and depending on the focus of their farming operation, a large number of them are finding it challenging to meet their financial obligations in the short term. Livestock producers struggle with high fuel, fertilizer, feed costs, the strong Canadian dollar, and low prices. My question to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: can the minister tell us what is being done to address this serious situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question indeed. Ensuring that our agriculture and food industry stays competitive and healthy and has a healthy bottom line is certainly a priority for this government. As you know, the Alberta farm recovery plan provided \$165 million last year to help offset the rising costs. We are currently working together with the beef and pork sectors to help develop a long-term strategy and look at the impact of some of the government regulations that we ourselves are imposing on them, because it certainly is a burden to the industry at this time.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with this group that's studying the problem, could the minister please update us on the progress of this study?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you. Yes, I can, Mr. Speaker. The Competitive Initiative Steering Group has reviewed and carefully considered a lot of the industry reports and research and the presentations made to them. The group is currently seeking stakeholder feedback on their draft report. The report and the feedback mechanism are both posted on our ministry website. I'm certainly confident that the final report, expected in June, will offer some balanced solutions and a number of high-impact recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the same minister. There's a section on the country of origin labelling in the proposed U.S. farm bill that poses concerns for both our producers and food processors. Could the minister please update us on the status of this situation?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. The country of origin labelling certainly is a concern to us here in Alberta and, indeed, Canada. It will have a negative impact on the mutual benefits of our trade relationship elsewhere. We will continue to work with our federal counterparts and oppose the mandatory country of origin labelling. In our view it is a violation of the commitments through the NAFTA and the WTO organization.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Highway Maintenance

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I questioned the Minister of Transportation about the poor maintenance of our highways. He stated, "Our maintenance contractors are paid only when they go out on the road." Could the minister please clarify this? Are maintenance companies paid on a per hour out on the road basis?

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Their vehicles are out of their shop working on the road; then they are paid. I'm not exactly sure if it's on the kilometre or on the mile, but they don't get paid unless they're out on the road.

I just want to add that we have a storm going out there. We have people working around the clock, 24 hours a day. When you have conditions like we have out there now, where one minute it's snowing and the next it's not, we can have that snow cleared off a highway, the road bare, and 15 minutes later it's back to the way it was before. We have 26,000 kilometres of paved highway in Alberta that we're trying around the clock to maintain.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about the lives of Albertans here, and I'm not getting the answer I'm looking for from the minister. The minister has also said that contractors are out on the road simply "because they get paid." Is the minister relying only on financial incentives rather than binding performance measures to ensure maintenance is done?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how to get those members across there to use any common sense or to even think of what's going on out there. We believe very much in the safety of all Albertans on our roads. That's why we have cameras placed up and down the road. They can link onto our website and see what condition the road is in. We are asking people not to travel unless absolutely necessary to do so because we care about their safety.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our highways are so safe; that's why there were deaths on the QE II yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, the best way of determining whether maintenance companies are doing their job is for the minister to table in this House the details of their activities. Will the minister table the

number of maintenance vehicles that were on the QE II this past weekend?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that today we have 500 vehicles available to go out to work. I will also tell you that I've had a number of people tell me that they've seen every day our snowplows out on the road. We know they're out there trying to do their job, and that particular member is going to have to take my word for it.

Barley Marketing

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, in a March 2007 plebiscite it was revealed that 62 per cent of producers across western Canada and a whopping 78 per cent of Alberta producers are in favour of an open market for barley, yet the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly continues. Many grain farmers are wondering when they will be free to sell their barley as they wish. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What is the government of Alberta doing to support its producers' desire for an open market?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's clear that the farmers of Alberta want more competitive options and to maximize their marketing opportunities. Although this issue must be settled federally, I'm proud to work alongside the governments of B.C. and Saskatchewan and support the federal government in their efforts to obtain full marketing choice of wheat and barley for the people.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is it this government's intention to eliminate the Canadian Wheat Board?

The Speaker: Oh, that's an ultra vires question. That's not within the jurisdiction of Alberta.

Mr. Dallas: Further, then, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: when can Alberta farmers expect marketing choice for their barley?

Mr. Groeneveld: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, you know, it's a fundamental Canadian right, freedom of choice. Some people don't understand that. What we're hoping for and what our producers are asking for is marketing choice, an ability to market their barley to whomever they may choose. All it was ever about is choice, to answer the question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Energy-efficient Affordable Housing

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Affordable housing is a serious issue in Alberta, so the emphasis must be on getting more units built and fast. We need to be very aware of how these units are being constructed, specifically in terms of energy efficiency. We can build needed units and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but the government must take this leadership. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: given that building energy-efficient affordable housing is good for the environment and helps low-income earners save money, why has the government not considered this in its affordable housing strategy, and are they prepared to do this now...

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has been recognized.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that is a very good initiative for affordable housing, and in fact there are projects in Alberta that have put in applications for the funding that's available. As you know, there was over \$200 million available in the last budget under the Affordable Housing Task Force report recommendation. Those projects have been approved for funding, as I said. They are ongoing. I think there is one in the Calgary community, hon. member, that you may be interested in viewing, and I could speak to that more or send the information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that.

Given that developers of affordable housing may not use energy-efficient standards unless it's economical for them, is the minister prepared to offer incentives to builders who would construct affordable housing using methods such as LEED standards and using energy-efficient appliances, windows, doors, paint, and flooring?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. LEED is the standard model to follow. I know that at the University of Calgary, for example, they had a very wonderful building through the Child Development Centre built recently with LEED standards. That is becoming much more prevalent in the community, and that would extrapolate itself as well to the affordable housing initiatives that we do have. As I said, communities and municipalities know their local priorities and are very concerned about the environment and about the housing that they build, and those projects are coming forward. Yes, we would look at those standards.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that, to the minister. It's good to know that this is in the discussion.

Given that land is a major barrier to constructing more affordable housing units and that the province needs to make more land available, will the minister ensure that any developments that occur on provincial land that has been provided for affordable housing are constructed using energy-efficient methods?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I'm more than pleased to look at that initiative as well that the member is bringing forward. Just in the total package, as I said, hon. member, you may wish to look at projects that are beginning in the province that are incorporating exactly what you've brought forward, in an environmentally sensitive way for the community.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Wind Power Generation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the government engages in meetings with its former campaign director to bring nuclear power to Alberta, over 3,600 megawatts of wind power sits idle, stuck in red tape, awaiting approval from the AESO. This amount of wind energy is enough to reduce Alberta's CO₂ emissions by over 31 megatons, a 13 per cent reduction, replacing our dirty coal with clean wind. To the Minister of Energy: will he mark Earth Day by cutting through the red tape and fast-tracking these wind power projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:20

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, I think that the member opposite would do very well to take a look at what we did last fall with respect to removing the red tape and also have a look at AESO's current list of projects in the queue, of which something in the order of perhaps 4,000 or 5,000 megawatts of possible wind generation projects are in queue now.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that alternate energy and particularly wind energy is a very, very good fit for Alberta. What we've done with respect to lifting and removing the cap in place and the work that we've done with integrating wind power into the transmission system in Alberta is stellar work, and it will prove out in the short term here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy. They are in queue, but they're still in queue, and they've been in queue for a long time. Is the reason the government maintains these bureaucratic roadblocks to wind power because you don't care about the environment, because the delays benefit your donors in the coal industry, or both?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, what I will reiterate is that Alberta, by the way, in Canada is a leader in wind power generation – a leader in wind power generation. In the short term we expect that we'll have up to 2,000 megawatts of wind power into the system in Alberta. We're moving and building a transmission system as fast as we can to reach that wind power generation, and it will come on, it will benefit Albertans, and indeed it will be a good fit for the environment.

Ms Notley: My final question is to the Minister of Environment. Given that the government's unfortunate climate change strategy advocates a 40-year wait for a comparable green energy based reduction in emissions, will the minister publicly urge his government to bring these wind power projects online now?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there has never been any dispute on my part that we should encourage and do whatever we can to bring wind power projects on, but there are two realities that I think we need to touch upon here. First of all, all the wind power in the world is not going to replace the significant amount of coal and other related power projects in this province. More importantly, NIMBYism is alive and well in this province, and frankly I don't know that there's a wind project in this province that hasn't had to face substantial opposition from the neighbours.

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

Agricultural Income Stability

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents have been following and have had concerns with the ongoing discussions regarding Canada's agricultural policy framework, or the APF. On March 31 Growing Forward replaced the APF, and the AgriStability and AgriInvest programs replaced the Canadian agriculture income stability, or the CAIS, program. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Do the new programs and initiatives go far enough to address producers' concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks asks a very good question because, in my opinion, these programs and initiatives certainly do not go far enough. Alberta is leading the way with a proposal to review the suite of business risk management, including AgriStability, to ensure that producers' concerns about predictability, bankability, responsibility, and, more important, simplicity are addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what have been the specific concerns that you're aware of that producers have raised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess one of my big concerns is that the new suite of business risk management programs initiatives is more complex and less responsive. A federal-territorial-provincial team will review the suite of programs at Alberta's insistence, and Alberta, through the AFSC, is leading this review to ensure that AgriStability is changed in order to meet the producers' needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the same minister: what actions are being taken to improve the AgriStability and potentially correct some of the inconsistencies resulting from the former CAIS program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is the only province to bring forward a new model for AgriStability that will address some of these producer concerns. We are currently piloting a model so that producers will know what the reference margin will be at the beginning of the year and what the reference margin will be at the end of the year, which is something totally new to us. We will be pushing hard for Alberta to run our new version of AgriStability on the pilot project for the year 2009.

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

Public Transportation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to get more people to use public transportation. We need to get people out of their cars and, where available, into transit buses and other forms of public transportation. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board.

An Hon. Member: Do you ride the bus?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, I do, hon. member.

Given that other jurisdictions have provided tax credits to encourage people where public transit is available to use it, will this government now consider adopting similar tax credits?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we take a far bigger approach to environmental issues than whether someone is riding a bus. The bus

systems here are run by the municipalities in the cities or the counties that operate them. If he wishes to know more about our tax policies, I would tell him to stay tuned here for about a half an hour, and we'll just enlighten him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the hon. minister's information his federal Conservative cousins in Ottawa certainly offer tax credits.

Now, my second question is to the Minister of Transportation. Will the Department of Transportation commit to building a high-speed rail link between Calgary and Edmonton with one stop in Red Deer?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I think this hon. member knows we're in the process. We've just gotten a report back on feasibility and rideability of a high-speed rail. We're in the process right now of dissecting that report. We're going to be going over it. It will probably be released soon, once we see what it's all about. Of course, everything is on the table to improve transportation in Alberta.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Transportation: when will the public see this report that the hon. minister refers to?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as soon as we've had time to even look at it and see what's in it. Everything this government does is open and transparent, as you know, and we will make sure that we inform people about what they need to be informed about.

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

Continuing Care Standards

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Auditor General released his report on seniors' care facilities, and he spoke favourably about the progress being made to make them better places in which to live. However, some critics have since charged that the improvements are principally on paper and are not really making a difference for continuing care residents. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What has been done so far to improve the day-to-day quality of life for residents in our seniors' care facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we have made progress in improving the continuing care system. We're pleased to note that our Auditor General feels we've made satisfactory progress in monitoring compliance in continuing care. One of the original recommendations from the AG was to introduce accommodation standards for continuing care, which we have done. My ministry is responsible for the accommodation standards, which are designed to ensure the safety, security, and quality of life of all residents. The standards are categorized in eight themes such as physical . . .

The Speaker: But we're not going to have time for it all, Minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental question is for the

same minister. For these standards to make a difference, they have to be followed. How do Albertans know the standards are being followed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those themes that I spoke about earlier are physical environment; hospitality services, including meals; safety services; and personal services. The way that we ensure that the accommodation standards are being followed is by inspecting long-term care and supportive living facilities for compliance with the standards. For example, almost 400 supportive living facilities were monitored in the past year for compliance with the accommodation standards, and we issued licences for meeting the standards. Our goal is to inspect all facilities annually to ensure residents . . .

The Speaker: And we'll look forward to the conclusion in the next question.

Mr. Horne: Finally, Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: if the accommodation standards are not being met, what enforcement actions are being taken?

2:30

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The standards were developed to ensure that residents have a safe and comfortable place to live. A key partner in ensuring that the standards are being followed are the facility operators. We focus on educating operators on the standards and work with them to help ensure that the standards are met. This approach benefits both the residents and the operators in meeting the government standards. In extreme cases and after doing all these steps, we have the option and authority to effectively close a facility if residents are in immediate danger and the operator is not taking any action to protect the health and safety of residents.

The Speaker: That was very enlightening. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Clear-cutting in Parks

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In mid-December 2007 a part of W.A. Switzer provincial park near Hinton was clear-cut by Yellowhead county. Late last year areas in the Kananaskis along the Trans Canada Trail were also clear-cut. Provincial parks are supposed to provide protection for our natural heritage. However, for this government a short-term economic pursuit trumps environmental sustainability. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: what designated green areas in this province are actually protected, or is everything open to clear-cutting and industrial development?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question because I know he cares about parks, as does everyone in this Assembly. Relative to green I wish our parks were green right now. They're all white, but I do look forward to the day when they are green again.

To the member's question. As far as clear-cutting in parks, our policy is that we do not clear-cut in parks. We do not. Now, there might be activity in those parks that he might be seeing. He might be seeing some pine beetle control. He might be seeing some

FireSmart activities. We might be building a new campground. Those are things that could be happening.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I would invite the minister to witness Moose Mountain, Cataract Creek, and numerous other devastated areas in the McLean Creek, Sibbald Flats, and Ghost-Waiparous areas. That's clear-cutting.

To the same minister: what penalties were assessed for the unauthorized overcutting by Yellowhead county in the W.A. Switzer provincial park and by Spray Lake Sawmills along the Trans Canada Trail?

Mrs. Ady: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I'm unaware of those areas. I'll have to get back to the member with the specifics to his question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I shared those areas just moments before the House sat.

My next question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given that in Banff national park the pine beetle is fought not through clear-cutting but through targeted cuts and burns, why can't the same tactic be used in the Kananaskis at Sibbald and at Ghost-Waiparous?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member should begin by apologizing for misleading statements to this Assembly. The cutting that was done adjacent to the Trans Canada Trail is outside the protected area of Kananaskis.

I'd further like to point out that Parks and SRD have had very productive meetings with the Trans Canada Trail Committee. We've discussed where the trail is, how it will be improved. In fact, the trails he refers to are old logging roads. These meetings we had have actually resulted in an agreement between the Trans Canada Trail partners and ourselves to improve the trail, working with Parks and SRD.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Seniors' Facilities

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lethbridge seniors are served by two very active seniors' centres, with similar agencies across the province. These two centres provide many essential services to thousands of seniors. Services include educational programs, transportation, meals, crisis intervention, advocacy, home support, socialization, and more. These centres are struggling under increasing staff costs and utility costs to provide these essential services, and they may be forced to reduce services or increase costs, making these programs unattainable for low-income seniors. My first question is for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What kind of support is the minister providing to seniors' centres to ensure that they are able to provide the services that they are intended to?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province has many funding programs that organizations, including seniors' centres, can access. My ministry has developed a fact sheet detailing funding

opportunities for seniors' organizations, and this can be found by calling the seniors' information line. These funding opportunities include family and community support services, which is 80 per cent funded by the province, and funding provided directly to municipalities through the municipal sustainability initiative and a number of provincial lottery-funded programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Will the minister consider the option of allowing these seniors' centres to apply for grant support for core service delivery?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as the minister noted, a number of lottery-funded programs provide support for community organizations, including seniors' centres. Two of those programs are the community initiatives program and the community spirit program. Both are based on matching funds and have a limited life, so for long-term sustainability they wouldn't be quite appropriate. The community spirit program is a three-year program, and the CIP is a two-year program.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're fine?

Mr. Weadick: Yes. Thank you.

Highway 2 Yankee Valley Interchange

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the growth in Airdrie has put tremendous pressure on the QE II highway interchange in the southern part of the city, especially during the afternoon rush hour. This is a major irritation for my constituents and is also a serious safety concern. My question is for the Minister of Transportation. What is the minister doing to address this?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member is referring to the Yankee Valley Boulevard interchange, and I can assure the member that we've been working very closely with the city on this for the past few years. Last year we changed the signal pattern on the boulevard east of the highway to make the whole intersection more efficient and try to cut down on the big lineups. We also lengthened the off-ramp of the highway's northbound lanes to the Yankee Valley Boulevard to increase the ramp's capacity, so again that helps with the congestion and the lineups, especially at rush hour.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the same minister. I thank the minister for recognizing the importance of this problem, but I ask him: when can my constituents expect to see some action on this issue, and what will that action look like?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, despite the improvements I mentioned in the first answer, we realize that the current interchange is outdated and no longer adequately serves the traffic volumes and movements at this intersection, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to tell the hon. member that we're in the process right now of designing major upgrades to that interchange. We hope to have the tender out the beginning of next month or sometime next month. The project is on our three-year construction program, and we plan on starting construction in '09. If there's capacity available and we could get there sooner, we would do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: can the minister tell us how much safer this intersection will be when the interchange is finished compared with the present situation?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, interchanges are the safest and most efficient way to enter or exit a highway. On average in Alberta interchanges cut down collisions by about 45 per cent. Interchanges also reduce collision severity because they virtually eliminate T-bone and head-on collisions at highway speeds, and as we're all aware, a T-bone or a head-on collision at 100 clicks usually results in someone getting hurt or someone getting killed. I'm confident that this new interchange in Airdrie will greatly reduce this from happening.

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

Physiotherapy Services

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a very brief question for the Minister of Health and Wellness. It's my understanding that there's no continuity across the province in terms of provision of physiotherapy services. I'm wondering if the minister could tell us how those services are funded.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, physiotherapy is not one of the services that is publicly funded under the Canada Health Act, but Alberta is one of the provinces that does provide funding for physiotherapy through the regional health authorities. We currently have five regions that we have contracts with, who have contracts with private providers, and it's delivered under the community rehab program. There are, however, caps on these programs, and not all of the costs associated with physiotherapy are covered.

Mr. Olson: I have one supplemental question, sir. I'm wondering if the minister can advise as to how his ministry maintains continuity, then, in the granting of these contracts.

2:40

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I said, Mr. Speaker, they are contracts between the regional health authorities and private providers. It also should be noted that a good deal of the work that physiotherapists do in this province is through private access, be it workers' compensation or something similar. I guess it's probably the time to also note that much of the extra cost that isn't covered through publicly funded health care is covered through programs such as Blue Cross and other plans.

The Speaker: That was 102 questions and answers today, hon. members.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the first 18 signatures of a petition that reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions today. The first one is signed by over 140 citizens from all over central Alberta. It reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to launch a full public inquiry under the authority of the Public Inquiries Act into spying practices by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB) and the Minister of Energy's oversight role of the AEUB.

The second petition I have here to present to the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Edmonton, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate steps to prevent the 43-hectare Qualico gravel pit operation proposed for southwest Edmonton from going ahead as it will have significant adverse effects, such as lower property values and a decline in quality of life due to noise, pollution and heavy truck traffic.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to table the government's 20-year strategic capital plan before the Legislative Assembly. The government's 20-year strategic capital plan was released on January 29, 2008. The plan addresses Alberta's infrastructure needs and provides a vision for schools, postsecondary facilities, hospitals, roads, cultural and recreational sites, and other infrastructure that greatly contribute to Albertans' quality of life.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five letters from constituents from Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are Sara Coumantarakis, Darrel Musijowski, Donna Pyzyk, Garry Grykuliak, and Larrie McCaskill. They are requesting that Alberta's labour laws be changed in at least five significant ways.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters from 10 of my constituents in Edmonton-Strathcona: Marilyn Dumont, Carmen O'Brien, Gloria Jean Johnson, Erika Perreault, Paul Graul, Jessica Hawthorn, Ryan McGinn, and Joshua Aromek. They are calling for changes to Alberta's labour laws to, among other things, bring them in line with international human rights laws and to ultimately create a fairer labour relations climate in Alberta.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling two reports from the excellent Calgary board of education. The first is entitled Annual Education Results Report 2006-2007, and the second is entitled Report to the Community 2008: World-Class Public Education.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the House will now recess until promptly at 3 o'clock. I would like to advise all members, though, that the audio and video streams will run during these 15 minutes, so be advised that your comments might be heard and your actions might be seen as well. We'll be back here at 3 o'clock.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:45 p.m. to 3 p.m.]

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages 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 estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Government Motions

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving Government Motion 9, I wish to table the 2008-09 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2008-09 government estimates.

Also being tabled for the information of the Legislative Assembly are business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of the Government Accountability Act. In addition, the Government Accountability Act requires that the government at the same time table the government's business plan and consolidated fiscal and capital plans. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Premier will table the government's business plan, and the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise will table the consolidated fiscal and capital plans.

9. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that the messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2008-09 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, the 2008-09 government estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Are there any participants?

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

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the government's strategic business plan as required under section 7 of the Government Accountability Act. The strategic business plan will set out the government's vision and long-term strategic plan. It also includes the government's three-year business plan, which outlines the government's goals and strategies and, most importantly, measures the results over the next three years of our business plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving Government Motion 10, I wish to table the government's consolidated fiscal and capital plans for Budget 2008. The consolidated fiscal plan is required under

section 4 of the Government Accountability Act, and the consolidated capital plan is required under section 7.1 of the same act.

Budget Address

10. Ms Evans moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Ms Evans: A budget is about more than numbers. It is about what those numbers represent. I begin our government's Budget 2008 with the number that matters the most: 3.5 million. That, Mr. Speaker, is the number of Albertans who call this great province home. Two million of us are working, 867,000 of us are in classrooms from kindergarten to postsecondary, and 362,000 of us are seniors.

Today Alberta continues its fine tradition as a beacon of hope, a fresh start, a place that offers something better, not simply more. In this Assembly we contemplate the great risk taken by many of our ancestors, even some of our members, who came to Alberta. They came here to build a better life for their families and themselves. They came here to fulfill their dreams. Taking risks and taking responsibility are part of the culture of our province. Those attributes bring to mind the platforms on which any budget should stand: managing choices wisely while building for future growth. We will continue to build the right plan for today and tomorrow.

So let's start with two premises. The first involves our financial operating environment. Our economy is strong, and our finances are strong. Hard work and good fortune have made these exciting times in Alberta. Uncertainties like energy prices as well as exchange rates, national and international rules and agreements as well as the downturn in the American economy also challenge us to carefully consider our financial strategies. This environment offers both opportunity and risk. Albertans have learned to manage both for generations.

The second premise for our budget plan relates to our recent provincial election. Our government made clear commitments in five priority areas: delivering health care effectively and efficiently; protecting our environment and developing our energy resources in a responsible, sustainable way; broadening Alberta's economic base; ensuring strong, safe, and vibrant communities; and providing the infrastructure that we need. Budget 2008 frames our new mandate, our plan to deliver on our commitments and on Albertans' trust in our Premier and in our government to provide sustainable solutions to manage the pressures of growth responsibly and to improve Albertans' quality of life and support wise, compassionate choices in a free democracy.

Let's start with our operating environment. It's no secret that Alberta has been growing at a torrid pace. That growth may cool somewhat, but it will still remain strong. There will continue to be essentially full employment and a healthy growth in population. We forecast real growth in Alberta to be 3.2 per cent over the next four years. Let's be clear on this: Alberta will remain a major driver of the Canadian economy. Our provincial programs and services will continue to attract people and jobs. Though the United States may show less demand during this time for our goods and services, our strong foundation of investment will continue to fuel growth, create wealth, and expand new markets.

We have developed our financial plan, recognizing that Alberta is in a special position. Our income offers the tremendous privilege of funding services that are beyond the capacity of other jurisdictions. Price volatility is very real. When we presented our budget last year, oil was at \$61.83 per barrel. Just five years ago it was less than half that price. A shift of only a dollar in the price of oil over 12 months gains or loses Albertans \$130 million. We have budgeted the price

of oil at \$78 a barrel this year. That's at the cautious end of a wide range of private-sector forecasts, and we believe that our price forecast is within our tolerance for risk and a reasonable point from which to plan. Once our new structure for royalty revenue is fully implemented next year, it will generate a further \$1.8 billion a year based on our forecast prices and production levels. This year we expect our total revenue to be \$38.6 billion.

3:10

Our financial plan includes our Premier's direction to support a more sustainable economic future with a renewed call for an investment and savings policy for the long term. Albertans save money for their children's education. They save for their retirement. So it's important for their government to ensure that future generations cope with this resource-reliant and therefore cyclical nature of Alberta's economy.

Based on our revenue predictions and our spending commitments, we target a surplus of \$1.6 billion this year. Of course, that could be higher if energy prices stay where they are today. We have a plan to deal with surpluses that come in higher than expected. This involves allocating one-third of any increased surplus to savings. The other two-thirds will go to capital spending, of which at least half will go for maintenance. Last year under this policy we saved a billion dollars, which was placed in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

Altogether we have put almost \$7 billion into long-term savings since we retired our provincial debt. This includes not only the heritage fund but other endowments supporting scholarships and medical, scientific, and engineering research. This year we'll deposit \$279 million into the heritage fund to keep pace with inflation. Over the next three years we plan to contribute almost a billion dollars plus any additional savings that will accrue from in-year surpluses.

Let's look now at how our government will deliver on its spending commitments to Albertans. Respecting those commitments, our total expenses this year will be \$37 billion. That's an increase of \$3.3 billion, or 9.7 per cent. It reflects the growth in population and inflation in Alberta last year as well as capital commitments and new and expanded services. In 2007 Alberta grew by almost 68,000 people. That's more than the population of Medicine Hat. As people keep coming to Alberta, the demand for services and the costs of producing those services continue to rise.

More than 70 per cent of our operating expenses is spent on health, education, advanced education, seniors, and also those people that are most in need, Albertans that really need our help. Based on our three-year capital plan as well as our longer-term 20-year plan, our capital spending rises by 22 per cent this year to a record \$8.7 billion. That's almost \$2,500 per person, which is more than three times the average of our fellow provinces.

Now let's examine our five priorities. Mr. Speaker, health care is Albertans' largest priority. It's also our largest spending area, taking a third of our budget and the largest portion of our spending increase this year. Our program expense in Health and Wellness is up by 9.1 per cent this year to more than \$13 billion. This pays for professional services, facilities, equipment, and information systems. It also provides new and redeveloped health facilities in places like Calgary, Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, and Sherwood Park. Over the next three years we'll commit \$145 million to attract and retain physicians and other health care professionals.

On energy development and the environment we'll proceed in a leading role in responding to climate change through carbon capture and storage, saving energy, and greener energy production. We'll commit almost \$600 million over three years to address climate

change and reduce greenhouse gases. We will invest almost \$800 million to support our Water for Life strategy and other water, waste-water, and irrigation projects.

To broaden the base of our economy, a new Alberta Enterprise Corporation will receive \$100 million and boost access to capital for early-stage knowledge-based industries. A new scientific research and experimental development tax credit will provide incentives for business to invest in research and development, starting at \$60 million and growing over time.

Our government also recognizes that the pressures that agriculture and forestry have been under have been enormous. We are committing just over \$1 billion to Alberta's traditional strengths in agriculture and rural development, and we're allocating \$55 million to protect our forests against the mountain pine beetle.

Mr. Speaker, to support safer communities, we will spend \$500 million over the next three years. This year we'll hire 67 new Crown prosecutors and court staff and a hundred new front-line police officers. More resources will go to high needs like mental health beds and services and expanded efforts to prevent addictions.

In the priority area of infrastructure our support for our communities continues through our municipal sustainability initiative. Over the next three years municipalities will receive \$5 billion for capital projects from this and other initiatives. We will fund specific new projects in the Fort McMurray region, and we'll improve and expand our provincial road network. This includes twinning highway 4 at Milk River, replacing the Smoky River bridge at highway 49 near High Prairie, working towards completion of the ring roads in Calgary and Edmonton. In total, Mr. Speaker, we'll be paving 2,800 kilometres of Alberta highways.

So immense are the demands of economic growth in Alberta that in the last five years our funding for roads has gone up by 300 per cent and our commitment to municipal infrastructure by 600 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, our government understands that the measure of a society is how well it takes care of its most disadvantaged citizens. This year we're dedicating more than \$500 million to Albertans in need of housing. We will continue to fund the construction of 11,000 new affordable housing spaces over five years. We'll continue to support emergency and transitional shelter services as well as to improve our strategies to prevent homelessness and eviction.

There are funding increases for aboriginal people, for Albertans on lower incomes, for seniors, and those with special needs. We will also increase funding to agencies contracted by our government to provide care for Albertans to help those agencies recruit and retain staff.

We continue to invest in our children and our youth and their education. We will create 14,000 new child care spaces over the next three years. We'll build or do major upgrades to 134 schools, and we'll expand capacity and access for postsecondary learning and provide more support for members of groups that are under-represented in the adult learning community. We have always valued education in our province. Our children, our students remain our most cherished hope for our future.

Reflecting the importance of Alberta's grassroots and our volunteers, we're allocating over \$500 million to community facility projects this year. We will contribute \$50 million towards the new capital region river valley park as part of our efforts to promote tourism. The new community spirit donation program will provide \$20 million to encourage charitable donations.

3:20

We recognize that culture is vital to our well-being. We'll provide \$12 million to implement our new cultural policy, the Spirit of Alberta, most of which will be dedicated and allocated to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

Mr. Speaker, overall, Albertans pay the lowest taxes in Canada, and our government aims to keep it that way. Once again, we're increasing personal tax credits to account for inflation. We're also boosting tax credits for caregivers, for Albertans with disabilities, and also for working families with middle to low incomes. These measures will save taxpayers \$180 million a year.

Here's what this means to Albertans. Indexing tax credits to inflation will save a family with two children about \$200 per year. A lower to middle-income family with two children will receive \$316 under the increased family employment tax credit. Families caring for elderly, live-in parents will more than double their tax savings, from \$436 to \$936, and disabled Albertans who are eligible for the disability supplement will see their annual savings grow from nearly \$1,200 to almost \$2,200.

Mr. Speaker, our Speech from the Throne reiterated our promise to eliminate health care insurance premiums within four years. We're going to do even better than that. As of January 1, 2009, Albertans will not pay health care premiums. This will save Albertans and businesses \$1 billion a year.

Here's what this means to Albertans. A single person paying a full premium will save \$528. A working family, a couple with two children, will save \$1,056 a year. If you add up our reduction in taxes and premiums, individuals, families, businesses, and organizations will save almost \$1.3 billion a year in this budget. If Albertans and Alberta businesses were in any other province, they would pay between \$10 billion and \$18 billion more each year in taxes. That would be about \$3,000 to \$5,000 for every single Albertan.

Mr. Speaker, we believe this is the right plan for today and tomorrow. This plan and this budget respect the privilege of governing in Alberta. In this blessed time of prosperity Alberta will remain a beacon of hope for those who seek to improve their lives. Alberta's strength will continue to benefit all Canadians. As we celebrate the arrival of new pioneers every day, our government will keep working hard to maintain Albertans' trust, to open doors of opportunity for them, to engage citizens of all ages and backgrounds to achieve their full potential, and to build an even better Alberta together.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin my comments by congratulating the minister on her first Budget Address. Well done. I will have extensive comments, which I'm sure everybody in the Assembly would love to hear. However, out of respect for the events of the day I beg leave to adjourn the debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with normal practice I would move that we now adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:26 p.m.]

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