



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 13, 2008

Issue 18a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta

## The 27th Legislature

First Session

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Fred, Stony Plain (PC), Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC) MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L) Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC) Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP), Leader of the NDP Opposition McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC) McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Environment Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC), Minister of Sustainable Resource Development Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP), Deputy Leader of the NDP Opposition, NDP Opposition House Leader Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC), Government Whip Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC) Ouellette, Hon. 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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 13, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have, actually, two introductions if I may, one on your behalf. I would like to introduce to you and through you 10 grade 6 students from the Morinville Christian school. They are accompanied this afternoon by teacher Mrs. Crystal Terhorst; teaching assistant Mrs. Trudy Gordon; one of their leaders, Pastor Doug Gordon; and parent helper Mr. Clayton Rosaasen. I've probably butchered that one pretty badly. I apologize. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Dr. Martha Piper, a nationally renowned leader in education, science, and technology, who has been appointed chair of the National Institute for Nanotechnology board of trustees. Dr. Piper's appointment continues a distinguished career in which her commitment to the advancement of research is well known throughout North America. She has held numerous provincial, national, and international advisory positions related to research and technology. Dr. Piper is a former president of the University of British Columbia and is well known in Alberta from her time as vice-president of research and external affairs at our very own University of Alberta. She is seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members here some extremely intelligent, excited, enthusiastic, and energetic young students from my constituency who attend Jackson Heights school. They are accompanied today by Ms Bruins and Mrs. Schenk, their teachers; and also by parent helpers Mr. Behr, Mrs. Singh, Mrs. Bajwa, Mr. Michelsen, and Mrs. Corkett. I'd ask all of them to please rise and receive the thunderous applause of the Assembly. Welcome.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure and an honour for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students from the Rosedale Christian school, a school in my riding near DeBolt. The teachers are a dedicated group, and the three that are with the group here

today are Katie Wohlgemuth and Pete and Sheila Toews. They're accompanied also by parents Stephen and Marilyn Friesen and Rick and Martha Isaac. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce today to you and through you to the Assembly 16 students from Metro Continuing Education. They are participants in the LINC program, a precursor of ESL, and between them they have roughly eight first languages. They are accompanied today by Betty Woloszyn, and they are seated in the public gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you three gentlemen that are visiting us today: Lanny Westersund, Jeff Callaway, and Walter Wakula. These three individuals have spent a considerable amount of their time being involved in the political process in our province both provincially and federally, are here on some meetings, and are very involved with the business community in Calgary. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Merci, M. le Président. C'est mon grand plaisir d'introduire à vous et par vous à tous les membres de notre Assemblée Judith Handfield, une étudiante d'échange de l'Université de Montréal qui vient nous accompagner. Elle va être le nouveau membre de notre équipe Libéral pendant cet été.

[Translation] Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of this Legislative Assembly Judith Handfield, an exchange student from the University of Montreal who will be part of our Alberta Liberal caucus staff for the summer. [As submitted]

Judith is from Contrecoeur, Quebec, and is here as part of the Quebec-Alberta student employment exchange program. She has a master of arts in political science, specializing in international and compared politics. We are sure she will find that her experience at the Alberta Legislature will be informative and educational.

S'il vous plaît, Judith, levez-vous. I would like all members to join in offering her the warm greetings of this House.

**The Speaker:** Le membre honorable pour Calgary-Currie.

**Mr. Taylor:** Merci, M. le Président. Let's do this in English. I would like to introduce to the House today and to you, Mr. Speaker, a couple of people from Calgary-Currie and from my office who help me stay one step ahead of the health minister and the others across the way there [interjections] – oh, now, don't heckle – and who very much help on a day-to-day basis in all the activities in the office. They are a great help to me and a great inspiration as well. They're both quite young. My executive assistant and constituency manager, Andrew MacGregor, has his degree in political science from Mount Allison University down in New Brunswick in the town of Sackville, New Brunswick, and my STEP student this year, is a policy study student at Mount Royal College, Bil Hetherington. If they would both stand. Even after what I said about the health minister, hopefully all members will give them the traditional warm welcome.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Mr. Matthew Grant. Approximately one month ago Matthew came into my office, applied to be my executive assistant. I quickly realized he knew more about this than I do, so I hired him. I'm very proud to have him here today and would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to stand here today and introduce to you and through you four friends of mine who are here to watch question period today. First of all, Mr. Sujan Singh Brar, a lawyer from Punjab, India, is visiting our Assembly. He has been practising for 25 years, and he lives in the same city, Moga, where I attended college. He extends an open invitation to all MLAs to visit Moga, Punjab, India. He came to Canada recently to attend the wedding of the son of our mutual friend, Mr. Harry Brar. He's also sitting in the gallery today. He's very devoted to serving our community, and I am happy to recognize his efforts here today. My third guest is Mr. Harminder Singh Toor, visiting from London, England. His wife, Mrs. Saganjeet Toor, is also here today. My guests all are seated in the public gallery and are happy to be here. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional welcome from this Assembly.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

#### Excellence in Teaching Awards

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday, May 10, educators and their colleagues and families gathered with MLAs and education stakeholders to honour the finalists of this year's excellence in teaching awards. Today I'm proud to commend these finalists, 23 outstanding teachers and principals, nominated by the public and their peers on their great achievement. These finalists were drawn from 130 Alberta teachers and principals who were selected as semifinalists for the annual awards due to their creativity and dedication in the classroom.

1:40

This year was the 20th year of the excellence in teaching awards. This year we've not only been able to give our thanks but to give back to these teachers and principals in a small way. Semifinalists will receive up to \$1,500, and finalists will receive up to \$4,000 to attend an educational conference of their choice. This is a wonderful new addition to the excellence in teaching awards and gives these teachers an exciting opportunity for professional development.

I'm sure all of us had a teacher who made a difference in our lives. The awards finalists made a difference every day as an inspiration to their students, teaching colleagues, and all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, no education system is better than its teachers. Alberta has some of the best teachers in the world, and the excellence in teaching award finalists are truly the very best. When the bar has been set so high, just to be nominated is noteworthy. To be a semifinalist is a significant achievement, and to be a finalist is a true honour. As a former school board trustee I can tell you that the semifinalists and the finalists represent just a small sample of the great work teachers do every day in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Assembly to join me in thanking the excellence in teaching awards finalists for their wonderful work. Thank you.

#### Finlay Bridge

**Mr. Mitzel:** Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure and pride to rise today and inform this House about an event that is happening tomorrow in Medicine Hat. All of our early communities were established along Alberta's river systems, and Medicine Hat was no exception. In the late 1800s a ferry was used to cross the South Saskatchewan River. The ferry was in operation about six months of the year every day except Sundays. On Sundays pedestrians used the railway bridge, a dangerous choice. During the winter crossing the river on the ice was also a common practice.

Mr. Speaker, a bridge was constructed and officially opened by our first Premier, Alexander Rutherford, on May 14, 1908, 100 years ago tomorrow. It's named in honour of William T. Finlay. William T. Finlay ran for the Legislative Assembly of the North-West Territories in the 1898 general election but was defeated by Mr. Horace Greeley. He then served as the mayor of Medicine Hat from 1900 to 1902 before running again and being elected the MLA for Medicine Hat in 1902. He became Alberta's first minister of agriculture after the province was created on September 1, 1905.

William T. Finlay ensured the project was discussed at the first ever Executive Council meeting of the newly created government of Alberta. The price tag for the bridge was \$140,000. At the time of its completion Finlay Bridge was the longest traffic bridge in Alberta: 900 feet. Although built in a utilitarian manner, Premier Rutherford called it the best in the province and a credit to the city and the province. Until the opening it was referred to as the new bridge or the provincial bridge, but Premier Rutherford christened it the Finlay Bridge at the official opening. Finlay Bridge, being the only traffic route through Medicine Hat, was considered a part of the Trans-Canada highway until the Trans-Canada bridge was built west of the city in 1955.

Mr. Speaker, 100 years after its opening Medicine Hat is celebrating the rededication. Please join me and my colleague the MLA for Medicine Hat in congratulating Medicine Hat on the rededication of their beautiful Finlay Bridge.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

#### Careers in Manufacturing Awards

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of Manufacturing Week, Careers in Manufacturing presented their inaugural awards to six Calgary businesses in recognition of their business excellence in creating progressive, safe, and innovative environments.

The 2008 best manufacturer recipients are Flextronics, KUDU Industries, and Net Safety Monitoring. The 2008 employer of choice recipients are Dynamic Source Manufacturing, Optima Manufacturing, and Gunnar furniture.

In addition to raising awareness about this vibrant and critical sector to our local economy, the Calgary best manufacturer competition was designed to promote manufacturing as a desirable and viable career choice and provide a forum for sharing best practices and a mechanism to showcase top-notch manufacturing employers in Calgary.

Calgary's best manufacturer award is one of a number of initiatives developed by Careers in Manufacturing. Since 2007 Careers in Manufacturing has actively worked to raise the profile of manufacturing in Alberta, promote careers in the industry, and dispel the stereotyped view of manufacturing.

Careers in Manufacturing includes business leaders, local organizations, as well as representatives from the provincial government. The best manufacturer awards and Careers in Manufacturing are tangible examples of the great results that come about when business, community, and government work together to build and educate Alberta's workforce.

I would like to express my congratulations to the winners and all those involved in Careers in Manufacturing.

Thank you.

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

### Lethbridge Sports Hall of Fame Inductees

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Lethbridge-West and I attended Lethbridge's annual Sports Hall of Fame dinner. The inductees were Yoshitaka Kinjo, a special award for his dedication to karate and particularly for the amazing results he obtained with improving the mobility of those with very limited mobility.

Charlton Weasel Head, the athletic award. He was an all-around athlete in high school and went on to be an all-star in college basketball. He teaches and coaches and serves as a role model for aboriginal youth on the Kanai reserve.

Bertil Johansson, the builder award for track and field. For 20 years he has produced winning ACAC teams and individual champions. At Lethbridge College he has established a track club for elite athletes.

Tyler Birch, athlete award for his bowling and alpine skiing. In downhill skiing he has won medals at the national level for the Special Olympics and had two silvers at the Special Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan.

Rachel Evans, athlete award for volleyball. She was a three-sport star and female athlete of the year in high school, and she went on to MVP honours in the southern conference and NCAA tournaments when she played for the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Blair Kubicek is a builder for baseball. As the head of the Prairie Baseball Academy he trains successful ballplayers who go on to professional careers, but just as importantly he produces great citizens.

The sportspersons of the year were Zach Boychuk for hockey and Team Canada for the world senior women's curling championship.

The team award was to Lethbridge College Kodiak basketball '03-04, who won the Canadian women's basketball crown.

We are very proud of their contributions that make Lethbridge the great place it is to live.

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

### Royal Canadian Army Cadets

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon in acknowledgement of one of the most important youth organizations in the Didsbury community and district. The Royal Canadian Army Cadets are celebrating their 20th year this year in Didsbury. The Royal Canadian Army Cadets is a national youth organization supported by the Army Cadet League of Canada, the Canadian Forces, and local organizations and individuals. They partner together to provide uniforms, equipment, training, financial support, and accommodations to Canada's army cadets.

The army cadets have been around since 1879, and today they comprise over 450 corps and boast numbers of 21,000 strong and growing. This is the largest federally sponsored youth program in Canada and is offered to young Canadian men and women aged 12

to 18 years. The aims of the Royal Canadian Army Cadets are to develop in youth the attributes of good citizenship and leadership, to promote physical fitness, and to stimulate interest in the Canadian armed forces. However, army cadets are not part of the Canadian armed forces.

One of the defining elements of the army cadets is that it offers many unique adventures and experiences. Mr. Speaker, imagine the experience and the thrill of abseiling down a rock face or learning to navigate in the wilderness. Well, the army cadets can help young people do those things and much more. Experiences like this as well as the lifelong friendships that they promote can be instrumental in the healthy development of our young Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the army cadets encourage the development of self-discipline, confidence, pride, responsibility, and the sense of self-worth: all characteristics that promote strong communities and a strong Alberta.

Thank you.

### Oral Question Period

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

### Reclamation of Oil Sands Tailing Ponds

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Suncor pond No. 1, the very first oil sands tailings pond, is now 40 years old, and only now is it coming close to being reclaimed. The minable oil sands strategy says that environmental liabilities will not be passed on to future generations. Is the Minister of Environment okay with the rate at which we're going, I wonder. Because if he is, everyone on the front bench over there is going to be dead by the time we get today's tailings ponds cleaned up.

1:50

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, the rate at which reclamation takes place is a direct relationship to the rate at which they are created. This is a long-term project. The oil sands projects have been going on, as the member pointed out, for 30 or 40 years and will continue to operate for some time to come. The ponds themselves will be retired at a rate that is appropriate for the longevity of the project.

**Mr. Taylor:** Yet environmental liabilities won't be passed on to future generations, and I'm the Amir of Kuwait.

To the same minister: given that this government sets the rules that allow 3 cents per \$125 barrel of oil as a damage deposit for reclamation – I wish I could get a deal like that from my landlord – would he consider a per-barrel amount that would have at least a passing acquaintance with the real costs of cleanup?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, maybe the member could send a cheque for \$645 million to his landlord, and then he'd get the same deal. It's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker.

I also need to point out that it is the responsibility of the oil sands developer to pay for the reclamation. The security that's held is only there as an insurance to the taxpayers of Alberta to ensure that if the company doesn't do it to our satisfaction, there are sufficient funds available to top it up.

**Mr. Taylor:** Yeah, that damage deposit should cover the cost of an oil company punching a hole in the apartment wall.

Here's a thought: ask Albertans what they want done. Will this minister commit to immediately establishing an all-party task force to do just that?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, such a task force is clearly unnecessary. We have rigid requirements in place. We have regulations that deal with not only the management of the tailings ponds but also the reclamation of tailings ponds when the time comes that they are retired.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, again. According to their annual report and financial documents Syncrude spends \$1.82 per barrel to remove the overburden from their oil sands mine site, yet this government requires them to pay just pennies on the barrel in order to put that landscape back. To the Minister of Environment again: why do the government's regulations allow for such a vast difference?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, let me be clear one more time. It is the responsibility of the developer to pay for reclamation. It is not intended nor would we expect that the deposits that are paid are to be used for the cost of reclamation. The developer is required by law to reclaim the land. The deposits are only used as an insurance to ensure that taxpayers are not left holding the bag.

**Mr. Taylor:** But taxpayers will be left holding the bag if there's not enough money in the fund and the oil company isn't around at the end of it all to clean it up.

To the same minister: why is this government setting the cost of reclaiming our land or the surety or the security or the damage deposit at .025 per cent of a barrel of oil?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe we should use the same analogy that the member started out with. Under his kind of rationale the damage deposit someone should be paying on an apartment building is equal to the value of the apartment building should they completely destroy it. Clearly, that's not responsible. That's not necessary. We're dealing with a situation where the developer is responsible for all costs. Should there be a situation where part of those costs are not borne by the developer, then there's a top-up provision that would be provided by the security.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that oil companies are legally bound to put all their obligations on oil sands reclamation into monetary value, does the minister accept that these figures show this government is lowballing the value of our environment, or have we just finally gotten an explanation of the soft tissue cap for car insurance?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the hon. member might want to have a look at the financial statements and disclosure documents associated with oil sands, and he probably will find that there is a liability that is booked that deals with the long-term costs that the shareholders are obligated to bear on behalf of the developer.

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

#### Homeless and Eviction Prevention Fund

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a constituent who

is newly released from prison. He qualified and applied for the homeless and eviction prevention fund, and he had approached a government social worker for temporary income support benefits. He was turned down because he couldn't provide a business card to prove that he was working, and then the housing worker turned him down because the support worker turned him down. After intervention he did get the housing money. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Have government workers been directed to consider emergency shelters like WEAC, the Herb Jamieson, and the Hope Mission as homes, therefore making people ineligible for the homeless and eviction protection fund?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, we recognize that there is a need for affordable housing, and the homeless and eviction fund has helped a number of individuals. When it comes to that specific case, we would have to be directed and given the information, and then we could follow up and try to help the particular individual. We are keeping on creating new units for Albertans in need of affordable housing, and that naturally takes time. Meanwhile, whoever gets eviction notices and needs help, we're prepared to work with them.

**Ms Blakeman:** He's just emblematic of others.

Again to the same minister: given that this fellow qualified for both programs, why did he have to have proof of a job before he could apply for benefits that are supposed to help him find a job?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, we will help the individuals. Our role is to try to, you know, make sure that the individuals will qualify for individual work, and if we can be of assistance in terms of helping them with retraining or support at any level, that's our mandate, and we will keep on working with those individuals. Again, going to the homeless and eviction fund, in the last year we've provided \$96 million to individuals across Alberta, so we are helping individuals.

**Ms Blakeman:** To the same minister: why aren't these programs working together to help people instead of collaborating to prevent or delay them from accessing the benefits that they qualify for?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very conscientious in terms of individuals needing different requirements for different programs. Wherever we can co-ordinate and help, we will, and if we can use the information that another ministry might have to facilitate things, then I'm prepared to look at that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

#### Nuclear Power

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. A recent German study found that children living within five kilometres of a nuclear power facility were 60 per cent more likely to get cancer and 117 per cent more likely to get leukemia. With statistics like that it's no wonder Germany has mothballed two of its nuclear reactors and is shutting down the others by 2020. Germany is joining countries like Italy, Sweden, Austria, and Switzerland, who are also closing nuclear facilities in favour of greener, safer power sources. My question is to the Premier. Is the Premier willing to risk the lives and health of Albertan children living near a nuclear facility through his failure to take a clear position on nuclear power in Alberta?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I don't know where the member gets his information, but we have clearly articulated a plan for open discussion on

nuclear energy in this province. The committee has been put together. It'll be putting together information for government, and then we will of course ask Albertans for their opinions. But, you know, it's funny the figures they show, because for years about 85 per cent of all electrical energy in France was actually generated by nuclear energy.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Why is the Premier's government not taking a clear position against locating nuclear reactors in the Peace River region when other provinces like British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Quebec have adopted policies to keep nuclear reactors out of their provinces?

2:00

**Mr. Stelmach:** Another erroneous statement. The province of Saskatchewan will be pursuing a discussion on nuclear energy.

To that member and to others in this House, if the movement is towards green energy, emission-free energy, we're going to have to put all the options on the table. We can't put our heads in the sand and pretend that this issue is going to go away. That's why we're going to have a good, full, public discussion on all kinds of green energy in the province of Alberta.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this issue is not going to go away, and neither is the nuclear waste, which will be good for hundreds of thousands of years.

Given that the Peace River nuclear power plant would generate 2,200 megawatts of electricity and there are more than 10,000 megawatts of wind power tied up in government's red tape, why is the Premier insisting on proceeding with nuclear power in this province when he's holding up in bureaucratic red tape the wind power that's ready to go?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, once again, wrong information. It's totally wrong. I believe that we continue to lead the country of Canada in wind power generation. We're also a province that leads in another way, and that is in buying the most green energy for the operation of government buildings. So we're leading the way in the country of Canada. Once again, we're going to have a full, open discussion.

I just want to raise this one point. There's this imaginary line on the map of Canada between Saskatchewan and Alberta, imaginary, on a piece of paper. Okay? If that plant is going to be across on the other side of Saskatchewan, what difference does it make? It's still on the same globe.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

#### Long-term Sustainability of the Economy

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has identified as a priority the need to enhance value-added activity, increase innovation, and build a skilled workforce to improve the long-run sustainability of Alberta's economy. My question is for the Premier. What is this next generation economy, and why would we move from our traditional strengths?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the next generation economy is

certainly one based on knowledge, and it's one that we have to transition to given our good economic situation in the province of Alberta today. We can't always depend on our traditional strengths of agriculture, forestry, and oil and gas. We have to diversify, broaden our base to allow children sitting in the audience to participate in a different economy, one that's going to provide them the same quality of life that we enjoy in the province of Alberta today.

**Mr. Weadick:** Mr. Speaker, my second question is also for the Premier. How much will this cost?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, just like investments made by government in the past in infrastructure and, of course, the various endowments we have in education, be it the science fund, all of the research investment opportunities – I just want to share with the House that, you know, we are doing a lot in research, and that's great, but if we don't commercialize any of that research here in the province of Alberta and those ideas leave the province and are commercialized, let's say, at Boston University, that country receives the benefits of taxes while we, of course, pay for the ongoing research here. So our goal is to ensure that we commercialize that technology here in the province of Alberta.

**Mr. Weadick:** Mr. Speaker, my third and final question is also for the Premier. Does this signal that the Alberta government is getting back into the business of doing business?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, this has been raised by some political pundits and others that look at government policy. One thing that we know for sure is that we are far behind other provinces in the country of Canada in terms of venture capital. We lost some very, very good ideas to other countries and other provinces because we didn't have enough venture capital. I foresee a time here in the province when through very careful planning and bringing in expertise that will be at arm's-length from government that will make decisions in terms of what ideas can be commercialized and grow a new industry in Alberta – I mean, we have the perfect opportunity today and, also, always thinking of the next generation.

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

#### Calgary International Airport

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary International Airport, in my constituency of Calgary-McCall, is key to business and prosperity in this province and this country. We need to put in place effective transportation infrastructure so that this fast-growing area can fulfill its potential in the coming years. A major part of the infrastructure is a tunnel to take the Airport Trail eastward under the new runway. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. What role is this government playing alongside the city of Calgary and the federal government in planning for the Airport Trail tunnel?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, at this point in time nobody has come forward to us for any funding or anything to work with that. I would have to look at it at the time that they come forward. We are working on transportation near the airport with the Calgary ring road. Of course, safety is our number one concern here.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is also for safety and for the transportation to move the traffic flow from east to west at a rate which is not available as of yet. Given that there is a limited time frame on this because of the approaching runway construction, when can my constituents and all Calgarians expect to see action from this government?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, his constituents see action from this government all the time.

**Mr. Kang:** Well, I have to see it on this one, sir.

What funding will the government be providing if they approach you for this project?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I can't say that at this time. We'll have to wait and see what type of funding they're looking for, and we'll have to see, really, if it's a responsibility of this government or not.

#### Undergraduate Nanotechnology Education

**Mr. Dallas:** Mr. Speaker, the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta are now offering programming for undergraduate students in nanotechnology. Can the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology tell us why this government is supporting undergraduate training in such a specialized field?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. Premier was just talking about, the next generation economy is an investment that this government is working towards for our young people. So we need to make sure that there's an investment in the undergraduate training in nanotechnology because that's one of the strengths that this province has because of investments that we've made in the past. We committed \$130 million a year ago, which included a \$30 million investment to establish these nanotechnology centres to attract world-class researchers as well.

**Mr. Dallas:** Can the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology tell us how many seats are available for undergraduate students who wish to enter the nanotechnology field?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We did in fact announce today that the total would be about 600 seats. What that didn't say was that we would have 380 seats in the University of Alberta and roughly 220 seats in the University of Calgary. As well, we're going to be moving out with more of those types of announcements on nanotechnology in the near future. It is a platform technology. What that means is that it covers a lot of different areas. But you need the specialized training in that undergraduate field so that we can move forward with commercialization, as the Premier said.

**Mr. Dallas:** Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what is this government doing to prevent a brain drain once these talented people in a very highly specialized field graduate?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a very important priority for us that we not only attract world-class and world-scale researchers into our postsecondary institutions, both at universities and in applied research areas, but by doing that attraction and creating the economy

here and commercializing those products here, it is our hope that the jobs, frankly, will be here for those students and for those researchers.

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

#### Violence in Licensed Premises

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend Edmonton's downtown turned extremely dangerous for two police officers responding to a call from a nightclub. At 2:30 a.m. an intoxicated crowd turned on the officers trying to diffuse an alcohol-related fight. The problem is this: downtown Edmonton and Calgary are getting more violent with more bars but without the police resources needed to ensure officer and public safety. To the Solicitor General. Even though you're providing more funding for police officers, it takes time to get those officers on the street. What will you do now to ensure that police officers have the resources needed to keep the public and themselves safe this summer in Calgary and Edmonton's downtown cores?

2:10

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is certainly correct when he talks about the disturbing violence that occurred in Edmonton over the past weekend. The 35 new officers that are coming to Edmonton and the 41 in Calgary are certainly going to help patrol those streets. But, again, it's certainly about more than that. It's about the community getting involved and people drinking responsibly. We are looking at some new regulations involving the serving of liquor, which, hopefully, will keep people in a more sober state so that they act in a more reasonable manner.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bar owners and operators in Edmonton have expressed frustration at the police response times for downtown locations in Edmonton. This is not the fault of the police; it's a question of resources. To help out these police officers, will the minister commit to using sheriffs in a deterrent role this summer in the downtown to protect public safety?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I just want to reassure the House and the hon. member that policing is a municipal responsibility. In regard to the sheriffs that we have, their main mandate is highway patrol and court duties. Regarding ensuring safety in our licensed premises, we have initiated training for security staff for our licensed premises, called ProTect, and to date we've trained over 500. It's going very well, and it's very well received. It offers new skills to these people so that they can handle these situations before they get out of control.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A different question to the same minister. It's in regard to furthering public safety. He spoke some time ago about bringing in minimum prices for drinks at bars, and I believe he is alluding to that. When is he going to bring in this type of legislation to protect the citizens here in Alberta?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again the hon. member brings up a point that's very near and dear to my heart. It's not only minimum drink prices; it's happy hour times and those types of things. So stay tuned. We'll be bringing something forward fairly quickly on that, and I'll look for the hon. member's support.

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

### Apprenticeship Training

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Registration started this week for the '08-09 apprenticeship technical training year. In today's heated labour market apprentices and employers can feel pressured to skip technical training in favour of work. As a tradesman I fully understand the value of technical training. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is the government doing to ensure that apprentices don't skip technical training?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question. The government is promoting the benefits of technical training such as career growth. Obviously, many of our technicians, as they go through their apprenticeship training, will go back to work and perhaps find that their paycheque might be a little bit bigger. Also, it's a step towards that long-term goal in their career. There are benefits to the employers as well through various avenues, including field staff, scholarship programs, award ceremonies, and publications which we as a department put out. We're continually working with our trade training institutions so that they can be more flexible and innovative to provide the time that the workers might need so that they can get in when they need to. That could be double shifts or triple shifts.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and final question is to the same minister. We continue to hear that some institutions don't have enough apprenticeship seats. Why isn't the government doing more to meet the needs?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year we have a record number, more than 36,000 technical training seats available for our apprentices. Of course, that's across Campus Alberta, and we want to ensure that the students know where those seats are available. We're going to work with them. We're scheduled at institutions according to the number of apprentices that are registered in a particular trade in that region, so we're planning for those students to attend the training in their region. Should additional seats be required, we can add seats as well. We're going to address the concerns.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member. Fine?

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

### Supportive Living Facility Standards

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Enforcement of standards

has long been an issue in Alberta's seniors' facilities. In the 2008 AG's report this lack of government oversight and control was once again criticized. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: why are seniors' lodges not licensed and covered under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We introduced new accommodation standards and began inspecting government-funded lodges two years ago. All supportive living facilities, including lodges, must be inspected for compliance with the standards before they can be licensed. All lodges, supportive living facilities must be inspected for compliance with the standards before they can be licensed.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you for that. What are the parameters of the proposed supportive living licensing act?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** We have accommodation standards, so we inspect for a number of things within the lodges. Our inspectors will provide recommendations for any lodges that don't meet those standards. They are usually standards in housekeeping, meals, and other areas that are not health care related.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you for that. Why has this proposed legislation not been tabled in the Legislature? We need the legislation before they can get the licence.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that we're working under regulations, and our regulations are very strong at this point. We have procedures for all lodges that are inspected. If the inspectors deliver recommendations, we also have a variety of things that we can do if those recommendations are not followed.

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

### Edmonton Remand Centre Staffing

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A series of recent guard injuries at the Edmonton Remand Centre has raised new questions about the inability of this government to keep its corrections officers safe in this overcrowded facility. The remand population has risen by 150 per cent in the last decade, and with the government increasing police officers and prosecutors now, the population will continue to grow before the new centre opens in 2011. To the Solicitor General: will the minister commit today to hiring more correctional officers for the current remand centre to help manage the growing government-created overcrowding crisis between now and 2011?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will be happy to learn that in the last year we've increased staff over there by 60. We will continue to monitor the situation there. Certainly, the violence that's occurring there is disturbing, but again it's an indication of the violence that we see out on the streets. They end up in our facilities, and they also tend to be violent there. Our folks are highly trained, and they do react. Again, there are more staff in there, and we will continue to monitor it as time goes on.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the plans for the new remand centre contemplate an open-concept design, meaning no barriers between staff and inmates for most of the day, how can the minister suggest that such an arrangement along with more prisoners could possibly result in the need for fewer staff?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, when I was referring last week to the question regarding staffing, it was on a per-unit basis. Obviously, with a capacity for 2,000 inmates versus the 750 some-odd that we have in there today, I don't see the numbers of staff going down. The open concept makes it a lot easier to supervise those people and keeps the atmosphere in the facility a lot more manageable. It's a design and a new way of doing business that's gaining popularity. We already use it at our Fort Saskatchewan facility, and we believe it is the way to go.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Fort Saskatchewan facility holds nonviolent, minimum-security prisoners serving terms of less than two years and that the Edmonton Remand Centre holds prisoners accused of serious violent offences, will you commit to revisiting that plan in order to enhance the safety of both your inmates and your corrections officers?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, as we speak today, actually, the Fort Saskatchewan facility is almost a hundred per cent remand inmates, and the open concept works very well there.

## 2:20 Nursing Shortage

**Mr. Benito:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday we marked International Nurses Day and the beginning of National Nursing Week, that runs May 12 to 18. It is a time to reflect on all that nurses do for our health system, particularly during this time of critical workforce shortages. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How does the minister respond to those who say that the government isn't doing enough to address nursing workforce shortages in Alberta?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that this is National Nursing Week, and our government very highly values nurses as well as all health care professionals. It was recognized through a member's statement yesterday by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I think the hon. member asked a good question. It was addressed to some degree yesterday by my colleague the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology that as part of our workforce action plan we intend, working with Campus Alberta, to graduate some 2,000 nurses by 2012.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Benito:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister provide more information on the new restricted temporary permits that the College and Association of Registered Nurses is going to start issuing?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Liepert:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. The issue of temporary work permits is for those nurses who the college of registered nurses of Alberta recognize need some upgrading before they can get their permanent certification. As of June 1 the college is starting to issue

the temporary work permits. We believe this will be a significant factor in ensuring that some of the foreign-trained nurses are put to work immediately while they upgrade their skills.

**Mr. Benito:** Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: what is the government doing to make nursing a profession of choice, one that isn't stressful for nurses today?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, it's difficult to deal with. There's no question that nursing can be a very stressful profession, and I wouldn't want to try to say that it isn't. I would suggest that most people that enter the nursing profession do so because of a matter of choice: it's the passion of caring for people. We need to ensure, as I mentioned yesterday, that as many of our nurses are retiring, we have programs in place so that we can replace them so we don't have some of the stress that is in the system today.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

## Farm Worker Safety

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farm workers in this province, particularly those who work at large-scale operations, deserve the same protection and safety legislation that other workers in the province have. In Canada it is a constitutional right to work in safe conditions. In 19th century England some industry owners did not particularly want to make health and safety changes for workers either. They were forced to by law, and who today would turn the clock back? To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: for large-scale agricultural operations, at least, will he bring Alberta occupational health and safety legislation into the 21st century?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, first I want to say that any time we have a farm fatality or a farm accident, it's one time too many. Our goal is to have zero. That's why as a ministry we support a lot of the farm safety programs that are there. We also reiterate the fact that farms are very unique. They are both work sites and homes. Families live, they work, and they play there. They're not necessarily treated like construction sites. Our legislation at this stage does not apply to farms.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My following two supplementary questions are for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Given that there is a significant difference between small family farms and large-scale industrial operations, will this minister review safety legislation in relation to large-scale operations in Alberta?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times I answer the same question without making it quite boring because the answer is always going to be the same. I would like to maybe ask the hon. member what constitutes a large-scale farm.

**Dr. Swann:** These would be bringing in workers off the farm.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister recognize that he as a farmer himself may be in a conflict of interest on this issue and remove himself from decisions on this matter?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's quite an honour, to be asked to resign twice in two weeks. I'm sure my other ministers are getting a little jealous here.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a farmer. You're sitting about five feet away from a bunch of farmers. Did you ever consider crossing the aisle and talking to these people? They're not asking for it. They would tell me if they were.

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

### Temporary Foreign Workers

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the main issues facing this province is a labour shortage. In my constituency I have received feedback about the burdens this shortage places on the local businesses and employers. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What is this government doing to help the business community with this situation?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I want to say that Alberta continues to have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada at 3 and a half per cent. In fact, our workforce includes more than 2 million people. We've surpassed 2 million people. While it's still positive to see so many people working, the tight labour market definitely presents us with a lot of challenges, and we are approaching this in three different ways. The first one is to enhance training for our existing Albertans; the other one is to improve productivity; and, finally, to recruit talented people from outside our borders, including those from outside our country.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister. Many employers are recruiting temporary foreign workers to help meet this need. What can be done to help speed up this process?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, the temporary foreign worker program is a federal program, and we need to continue to work with them to ensure that it meets the needs of our employers. For some high-needs occupations employers may now conduct minimum advertising efforts rather than the more comprehensive recruitment efforts that are normally required before hiring temporary foreign workers. We are looking at different systems to speed up that particular process.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is also to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What can employers do to keep their temporary foreign workers permanently?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. There are two things that employers can do to retain a temporary foreign worker. They can apply for an extension to their labour market opinion, requesting the worker to stay longer, or the best method is to offer an employee a permanent job and nominate them for the provincial nominee program. This particular program allows workers in some occupa-

tions to stay permanently and speeds up the process for permanent residency.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste Anne.

### Francophone Job-seeking Services Services francophones pour la recherche d'emploi

**Mr. Chase:** Merci, M. le Président. The Ministry of Employment and Immigration has withdrawn the contract for francophone job-seeking services from the only francophone service provider in Calgary, giving it to Bow Valley College, which has no ties to the francophone community. Under the Official Languages Act it is required that these services be delivered by a francophone organization. Further services are being downsized to only 40 per cent of the actual historical demand.

Au Ministre de l'Emploi et de l'Immigration: pourquoi ces services ont-ils été déplacés d'un fournisseur de services francophone vers une organisation sans lien avec la communauté francophone? Why was this service moved out?

**Mr. Goudreau:** M. le Président, comme ministre responsable du Secrétariat francophone j'ai la responsabilité à toute la communauté francophone de m'assurer de développer, d'épanouir, et d'améliorer tous les services à la communauté francophone de la province de l'Alberta. Vis-à-vis le contrat à Calgary, on fait des demandes de proposition vis-à-vis tous nos contrats à travers la province, puis c'est d'après les . . .

**The Speaker:** Merci. Le membre, s'il vous plaît.

**Mr. Chase:** Merci encore, M. le Président. J'ai pourvu une translation pour toutes mes questions. J'espère de recevoir le même. Encore au ministre: puisque la Loi sur les langues officielles exige que ces services soient offerts par une organisation francophone, est-ce que le ministre s'engage à ne pas contrevenir à la loi et à restituer ces services à une organisation francophone? Since under the Official Languages Act these services are required to be delivered . . .

2:30

**The Speaker:** Okay. We can carry on.

**Mr. Chase:** En deux langues, s'il vous plaît.

**Mr. Goudreau:** M. le Président, je n'ai pas le temps, peut-être, de répondre en 35 secondes dans les deux langues.

Les règlements nous disent qu'on doit offrir les services en français. Ils ne disent pas qu'on doit se servir des organisations francophones pour offrir ces services. On a une obligation à nos communautés francophones d'offrir ces services, et c'est ça qu'on va faire. On veut continuer à servir les francophones de la communauté de Calgary et des communautés aux alentours de Calgary.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Merci, M. le Président. Étant donné que la demande pour des services francophones pour la recherche d'emploi a augmenté de 40 pour cent depuis les trois dernières années, pourquoi ces mêmes services ont-ils été réduits à 40 pour cent de la demande historique, et est-ce que le ministre s'engage à financer entièrement ces services? C'est une perte de 80 pour cent en total. Pourquoi, M. le Ministre?

**Mr. Goudreau:** M. le Président, les services qui étaient offerts à Calgary allaient plus loin que ce qu'on demandait dans le contrat. Ce n'est pas une réduction d'argent. On voit que même dans notre budget, qu'on vient de déposer en Chambre, on a eu une augmentation à notre budget. Puis on se serre de cet argent pour desservir nos obligations aux communautés francophones de Calgary.

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

#### Forest Industry Commercialization Initiatives

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Forestry Research Institute has been very helpful to the forest sector, partnering with industry and other science-based organizations. My questions are all to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Whitecourt-St. Anne based companies invest millions of dollars with AFRI, but tough economic times have hit the forest-based communities. What is the minister doing to ensure that AFRI supports our industry in these times?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly working with AFRI, the Alberta Forestry Research Institute, as well as the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development and the Minister of Employment and Immigration to try to mitigate a number of the devastating things that have happened in the forestry sector. AFRI, which was formed in 2002 and has representation from the industry, from academia, and from government, is working on future uses of forest biomass, value-chain improvements, new product development. In fact, they're also working on nanoapplications, and hopefully some of those 600 undergraduate students which we announced today will be potentially working in the forestry sector.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, all this talk about nanotechnology is exciting, but there are some tough economic times for the existing industries like in Whitecourt-St. Anne. What initiatives are you supporting, and who are you partnering with?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through AFRI and through the other departments, as I mentioned, we're working with AFRI to develop the concept of a fibre innovation network to explore opportunities in bioproducts, bioenergy in collaboration with some of AFRI's sister institutes – the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Alberta Energy Research Institute – working with the Ministry of Energy to help develop alternative forms of energy using cellulose and biomass. We're looking at support for the Alberta Sustainable Resource Development strategic alliance with Forintek Canada and had an agreement with the Alberta Research Council and AFRI to work on forestry initiatives in the value chain.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, given those answers, it's all fine that we're working on initiatives, but what will this produce? What kind of commercialization and products will we get out in the field?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as the Premier mentioned, we're talking about our next generation economy, and the things that we're doing to try to get our commercialization on track include working with the institutes, getting a better framework for our research institutes and our research innovation agenda here in the province. We're working with our postsecondaries to do that. We're looking at ways and means that we can offset that valley of the shadow of death in the commercialization, in seed capital. We're looking at venture capital, the enterprise fund, which we've introduced here in this Legislature as part of that proposal, Mr. Speaker, an integral part of creating the venture capital environment that we need in this province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

#### Temporary Foreign Workers (continued)

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Temporary foreign workers are required to challenge a theory and a practical exam to work at a compulsory trade here in Alberta. They have six months from the date of arrival in Alberta to write exams and obtain Alberta certification. The cost of this certification is \$450. My first question is to the minister in charge of apprenticeship and industry training. What percentage of eligible temporary foreign workers write a compulsory trade certification exam within the required six-month time frame from arrival here in the province?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member could describe for me which particular trade he's talking about, and I may be able to find those answers for him.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I clearly indicated to the hon. minister "compulsory trade."

Now, what percentage of temporary foreign workers pass the compulsory trade exams that they are required by the department to write?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it depends on which compulsory trade he's talking about. Certainly, for every one of the compulsory trades they're required to complete that exam within six months if they want to stay and work in the trade.

The department works with the employer. It is the employer's responsibility to help those temporary foreign workers with their exam. But we work with those individuals, whether that's offering English as a Second Language, whether that's practice exams in some cases. Certainly, we take this responsibility very seriously to protect the integrity of those compulsory trades and those certifications.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the hon. minister will not or cannot answer, to the minister in charge of immigration and employment: what role does the department play in tracking and controlling the temporary foreign workers with their examinations and with their visa extensions?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, we continue to provide ongoing support for our temporary foreign workers in the province of

Alberta. If there's a need for additional information as to what steps are taken or need to be taken to arrive at writing exams, we will give them that direction and that support. We don't necessarily monitor the number of months it takes or the numbers that actually pass. But we will provide the general direction for them.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

### Campsite Reservations

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm starting to receive a number of e-mails from my constituents regarding the difficulty they have with respect to booking a campsite in our province. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Is your department aware of the fact that a growing number of Albertans are frustrated with the exercise of trying to reserve a campsite and expect better?

**Mrs. Ady:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we all know that Albertans love their parks, and they like to spend a lot of time in them. The main issue at this time is busy phone lines. We don't have a central reservation system, and so you have to call the individual campgrounds. At our peak times, like the long weekend that we're facing, many people are calling because they want to visit the parks this weekend, particularly those most popular sites. It's an issue of customer satisfaction, and it's one that we need to resolve quickly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Is your department working towards a solution to assist the growing number of Albertans who want to be able to reserve a campsite to enjoy our parks by a method other than using a telephone or by walking in?

**Mrs. Ady:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we did a survey in 2006 that told us that 45 per cent of people still do like to use the phone. But at this time we know that we need to add options that are more convenient, so we're working hard to make it easier for visitors to reserve campsites in all our provincial parks and recreation areas. Online reservations aren't currently available, but increasingly it's what people expect, so we're investigating how to make that possible.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when can we expect to see changes made that will better meet the expectations of Albertans?

**Mrs. Ady:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this year resources are being provided to develop an online reservation system. In March parks hired a project manager to plan for an online central reservation, and additional staff and consultants will be recruited to meet the requirements of this initiative. Our hope is to solve this frustration as Albertans want to use their parks. For example, today CHED online said that there were no more spots available. Mr. Speaker, that's not true. There are still first-come, first-served sites for this coming long weekend, and people should check.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that was 106 questions and responses today.

2:40

## Statement by the Speaker

### Speaking in Languages Other than English

**The Speaker:** Just a brief comment with respect to the exchange between the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration. Since 1988 in this Assembly the use of French is a very acceptable language, and since the time I've had the privilege of being your Speaker, I've indicated that any language that any member would want to speak in the Assembly is permitted and permissible and in fact encouraged.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity did the courtesy of printing out his questions in both English and French and provided them to my office before coming in here at 1:30 to be circulated to all members to have on their desks.

Because I did receive a couple of notes, in the future should members want to do an introduction in Punjabi or Portuguese or Dutch, that's perfectly fine. Just as a courtesy at least for the chair and a courtesy for the members, provide a copy of the translation so that nobody would ever want to rule you out of order for saying things that you shouldn't be saying because we don't know what it is you did say.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

## Members' Statements

(continued)

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

### WTO Negotiations on Agriculture

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to highlight the importance of our agriculture industry and the current World Trade Organization negotiations on agriculture. Agriculture helped to build this province. Our rural communities and large centres enjoy the economic and cultural benefits that stem from the agrifood industry. In 2007 farm cash receipts were \$8.7 billion, the value of the food and beverage industry alone was \$10.8 billion, and Alberta's agrifood exports, which represent one-fifth of Canada's agrifood exports in total, generated a new record of \$6.6 billion.

Mr. Speaker, as an exporting province and nation in today's global economy our ability to compete and grow depends upon free and open markets and an effective WTO agreement. Independent analysts have concluded that a favourable WTO agreement and outcome could mean an increase of \$3 billion in Canada's annual agricultural exports.

With the WTO talks at a critical stage I'd like to acknowledge the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for his incredible efforts at the WTO negotiations and meetings in Geneva. The minister pushed hard for Canada to get substantial agreement on market access for our products: beef, pork, canola, wheat, and barley. He also continued to urge the federal government to eliminate the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly, Mr. Speaker, as we will soon be the only country with a monopoly who also advocates, ironically, for access to markets and free competition.

Our Ag and Rural Development minister met with representatives from key international markets, Mr. Speaker, including Australia, Indonesia, China, Brazil, the European Union, Argentina, and Japan. With the U.S. ambassador our government stressed the importance of substantially reducing domestic subsidies, respecting international trade rules, and making changes to their farm bill.

With everything that's at stake, it's critical that the ag industry, this Legislature, and all members support the ongoing work to advance the WTO agreement for the sake of agriculture and this province.

### Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petition that was presented on Thursday, May 8, 2008, and I can advise the House that the petition complies with standing orders 90 to 94.

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

**The Speaker:** All hon. members in favour of the report, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Speaker:** Those opposed, please say no. Carried.

### Presenting Petitions

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have another series of petitions from people in Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Lethbridge, Pincher Creek, and, I think, some Calgary ones. All of them are asking the government to commission an independent and public inquiry. This is around the government's involvement with the local authorities pension plan, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some petitions with numerous signatures asking for the government to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have over a hundred signatures from Albertans across the province, from Fort McMurray through to Calgary, that are calling upon the Legislative Assembly to pass legislation that will "prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace."

I have a second set of petitions, Mr. Speaker, calling upon the government to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

On behalf of my colleague from Calgary-McCall I am adding extra signatures to that list.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a signed petition asking for a "public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund."

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two

petitions to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. The first reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

The second petition I have is from citizens from Calgary and Wetaskiwin, from all over actually, and it reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

Thank you.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today five copies of the program for this past Saturday's dinner for the excellence in teaching awards. The program names the 20 award finalists and the three recipients of the Smarter Kids Foundation innovative use of technology awards. It also acknowledges the sponsors of the awards, which included Alberta Education, the Alberta school councils association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the *Edmonton Journal*, and the Smarter Kids Foundation.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three tablings today. The first is a letter from Barry Fisher expressing his outrage about the outcome of the seat distribution given the actual popular votes for the various parties in the March 3 election.

My second tabling is from a constituent who's very frustrated that she was given three times the amount while on medical social assistance and had her basic needs met, but when she became a learner, she had to drop out because it wasn't enough money for her to keep house and home together.

The last tabling is actually a series of letters from Leisha Richard, Sandy Dziwenka, Trang Nguyen, Dana McFadzen, Carmelito Manginsay, Christine Escalona, Evangeline Magallon, Seela Ramkishun, Pauline Wills, and Yvonne Huth, all of them requesting that Alberta's labour laws get updated, including a process for first contract, recognizing bargaining rights for public employees, and legislation outlawing the use of replacement workers, among other requests.

Thank you.

2:50

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five letters to table on behalf of constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar who are also urging the Alberta government to change the labour laws to make our Alberta labour laws fair to all working people. These individuals are Donald Wilson, Mr. James Hughes, Gerhard Schmauder, Geraldine Craig, Michael Lawrence Stark.

My second tabling this afternoon is a letter that I have received from a constituent, Mr. John Stroppa. Mr. Stroppa is reminding us that diabetes is a serious disease, that many Albertans are living with the disease, and he would like to see medication and supplies picked up by the Alberta government for this illness.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two news reports describing a German government study which showed that children living near nuclear plants are more likely to get cancer, in particular leukemia.

The second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of four letters from Albertans opposed to the development of nuclear power in this province. They are from Antoinette Voûte Roeder and Michael Roeder of Edmonton, Perry Hodder of Deadwood, Walter Feduschak of Manning, and John Reese of Berwyn.

Thank you.

### Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

### Main Estimates 2008-09

#### Executive Council

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. the Premier.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. members, I'm pleased to be here to appear before this committee to discuss the '08-11 Executive Council budget estimates and business plan.

I'd like to first introduce, of course, the staff from my office who are with me here today. I can see they're assuming their places. On the floor are my chief of staff, Ron Glen; Ron Hicks, Deputy Minister of Executive Council; Paul Whittaker, deputy secretary to cabinet; Steve MacDonald, deputy chief of policy co-ordination, sitting next to Ron; Roxanna Benoit, managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau; and Elaine Dougan, executive director of corporate services. Some of my staff are, of course, up in the gallery: Elan MacDonald, deputy chief of staff; Jordon Copping, my executive assistant; Ken Faulkner, executive director of the southern Alberta office; Paul Stanway, my director of communications; Tom Olsen, media liaison; and George Samoil, who's the director of House procedures.

The work of Executive Council is integral to the successful operation of government, from managing the co-ordination of policy to communicating with Albertans. Mr. Chairman, my remarks today will include a brief fiscal overview of the '08-09 plan, followed by some details and upcoming initiatives from the business plan.

Executive Council spending for '08-09 is forecast at \$30.1 million. It represents a \$6.4 million increase from last year. The increase is mainly due to two new initiatives. First, a million dollars is budgeted for the new Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, and \$5 million will be dedicated to a brand campaign planned and implemented by the Public Affairs Bureau. Salary increases matching those allocated across government make up the balance of the increase.

Before we get into the details of these initiatives, I'd like to offer an overview of Executive Council's program areas and priorities as outlined in the business plan. Executive Council includes my offices here in the Legislature, including communications and correspondence, and in the McDougall Centre in Calgary; the deputy minister's office, which provides advice and support to me on policy and organizational issues and leadership to the Alberta public service, whom I'm very proud of; cabinet co-ordination and support; the policy co-ordination office; the Agency Governance Secretariat; the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy; the protocol office; administrative support for the office of the Lieutenant Governor and Alberta Order of Excellence Council; and the Public Affairs Bureau.

Executive Council has outlined the following strategic priorities in the '08-11 business plan. They are to strengthen agency governance, enhance policy capacity, establish an economic strategy council, implement a strategic communications plan across government, lead an Alberta branding campaign, and implement the corporate communications policy for government. These priorities are part of my government's commitment to take action to secure Alberta's future.

An important part of this commitment is to secure continued prosperity for our province. The Premier's Council for Economic Strategy will provide advice to ensure a continued high quality of life for Albertans and that Alberta is the best place to live, work, visit, and invest. The council will help design a long-term strategy to transform Alberta's economy over the coming decades.

The work of the council is only part of the co-ordination and analytic support provided by Executive Council. The policy co-ordination office delivers long-term strategic planning and policy co-ordination and promotes cross-ministry collaboration. The office is tasked with strengthening policy support to government. It facilitates enhanced policy development capacity in the public service. To follow through on our commitment to ensure the transparency, accountability, and good governance of government boards, agencies, and commissions, we will also be implementing the recommendations approved by the government from the board governance review.

Mr. Chairman, the final piece of Executive Council I'd like to highlight is the work of the Public Affairs Bureau. The bureau supports the government's actions through external communications activities and provides internal communications leadership and support to government ministries. Communication is a vital part of our relationship with Albertans. They want comprehensive communications about the government programs and services that are important to them. They also want opportunities to provide feedback, and to ensure the quality, co-ordination, and consistency of government communications and to offer improved avenues for feedback, we are continuing implementation of a strategic communications plan for government. We are enhancing the government's internal communications mechanisms to better align internal and external communications and to ensure that government staff are receiving the information they need to do their jobs.

I would now like to talk about a very important new project that the Public Affairs Bureau has taken on. There is no doubt that perception is very important, and we must remain mindful of how Alberta is perceived here at home and abroad. It has a profound impact on the success of our province, affecting exports to world markets, swaying investment load, and influencing our tourism and immigration draw. Most importantly, it is a point of pride for Albertans, a lens on how we see ourselves and how others see us. That is why we will spend \$5 million on a campaign to reinforce a positive, accurate picture of Alberta and to increase awareness of our province as a great place to live, work, and invest. This is important

work, and we are prepared to put in some money and effort to tell the Alberta story.

Mr. Chairman and all members of the committee, that concludes my short introductory comments. I welcome the members to ask any questions they may have, and I'd just ask them to give the page number they're referring to so that I can find it in the book.

Thank you so much.

3:00

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member, do you wish to combine your times with the hon. Premier's for 20 minutes back and forth, or 10 and 10?

**Mr. MacDonald:** The clock starts at 3 – correct, Mr. Chairman? – for the 20-minute dialogue.

**The Deputy Chair:** Okay. Fine.

**Mr. MacDonald:** My first question to the Premier would be: how would you prefer to proceed? Would you like a Q and A for the 20 minutes, or would you like 10 minutes' worth of questions, and then hopefully I can get 10 minutes' worth of answers? We have in the past here in this budget cycle been using the Q and A, and it has worked, in my view, quite effectively.

**Mr. Stelmach:** It doesn't really matter. Whatever.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Okay, Mr. Chairman. Let's try questions and answers.

Now, my first question would be – and I'm going to reference the fiscal plan, page 17, the 2008-09 operating expense – that for Executive Council there is a 25 per cent increase here, or \$6 million, for the communications strategy, the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. Has this strategy been taken over from part of the former economic development portfolio?

**Mr. Stelmach:** The question was whether the economic strategic council will take over for AED. This council is envisioned to be very broad based. We will recruit some members for this council from within Alberta, within Canada but will also welcome support in terms of people from outside the country of Canada. The reason we're looking at the economic strategic council is that we want to broaden our tax base in this province. We have to search for the best ideas, listen clearly to the experiences of different organizations, and collate this information. It is one that will have a certain term period to it. It won't keep going on and on.

We want to bring the information here to Alberta so that we can make long-term decisions in terms of how we invest in commercialization, how we deal with new tax structures, any ideas that may come forward. We've learnt in the past that we have to invest more, certainly, in the knowledge-based areas and that we can't rely on oil and gas forever and ever. What better time than now to move from an oil- and gas-based, agriculture economy to one that'll move towards a knowledge-based over the next 10 to 15 years?

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, hon. Premier. Now, in the Auditor General's report, volume 1 of 2006-

07, from the fall of 2007, there was a disturbing audit done in the old department of economic development on the credit card transactions from Mr. Mark Norris and Mr. Sasha Angus. Transactions were not supported by adequate documentation. For instance, with Mr. Norris's card government transactions without supporting documentation added up to a total of \$10,000. For the other individual, Mr. Angus, it came to \$47,000. Were the Premier and his office staff so concerned about these transactions and the AG's comments that you decided to take economic development under the wing of your office? Is this one of the reasons?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I don't know how relevant '06-07 reports are. But, of course, when the Premier delivers the estimates, the topics are much broader than the Committee of Supply and the budget for Executive Council. If the hon. members want to go that way, then I'll take them on, and I'll also be able to ask them a few questions about their spending so that all of Alberta knows where they're going and their direction.

With respect to the strategic economic council we will continue to build on, of course, the advice given by those that have gone through various jurisdictions that have been successful. The one example that I've used in speeches before is the country of South Korea. In the '60s and '70s the country issued about 20, 30, maybe 40 patents a year. Today they issue over 5,000. What does that mean? Well, they now have one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. They're a knowledge-based economy, obviously, attracting some of the world's finest researchers and competing very successfully against other countries in the world. That is our goal here in the province of Alberta. We have a solid revenue stream for the next number of years, but we can't depend on it forever and ever, and that's why we have to seek advice on how we can broaden our economy.

The question that was raised on economic development probably would be better raised under Finance and Enterprise, but I guess they'll find a way of spinning it some way. You know, you might have some other questions with other expenditures.

**Mr. MacDonald:** I certainly do. Speaking of solid revenue streams, if the hon. Premier could please go to page 54 of the fiscal plan, there are a number of energy revenue scenarios there. There is a high scenario, an average, the budget 2008, and the low scenario. These energy revenue scenarios are based on a survey of oil and natural gas prices. Unfortunately, not all of these forecasts are publicly released, and I guess that would lead me to ask two questions at this time. The first one: does the hon. Premier think that this is open and transparent? The second would be: did the Premier's office or someone in the Public Affairs Bureau forbid the release of these forecasts? Thank you.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Chairman, we have the most transparent books in the country. This has been supported by various accounting firms, gurus, economists, FCAs. We'll continue to do so. We have been, obviously, very prudent in our fiscal management. This is why we are debt free. We have by far the lowest tax rates compared to any jurisdiction in Canada and also just about double the personal income tax exemption of any province in Canada. As a result we've seen a movement of people to the province of Alberta. It has also translated into a much younger population, and now we have a bit of a mini baby boom happening; I think an 18 per cent increase in births in Alberta over the last two years. That's a positive statement and a positive comparison to many jurisdictions in Canada.

Obviously, we're on the right track, but of course we can't take for granted the revenue streams from oil and gas. You know, it's

very hard to find someone that will pin their reputation on giving you the exact price. Nobody will do it a year out. There are ranges, and I can tell you that now more than ever those ranges will vary, even larger than what they are today.

I'll give you an example. We don't know what the result of the election in the United States will be. What will be the following policies in terms of withdrawal of troops out of Iraq? How that may affect Canada is one thing, but how will it affect the whole security of the oil supply around the world? Those are just examples of how oil and gas prices may be affected.

Weather, of course, can either increase natural gas prices, as we've seen in some years past with unusually cold weather, or prices may fall. I can tell you that a few years ago very few countries would look to having liquified natural gas receiving ports on their coasts. Now there are a number of proposals for natural gas to flow to the North American continent. There again, that might have an effect on the value of natural gas.

3:10

The other is, really, the amount of conventional oil and gas reserve that we have on the North American continent other than the oil sands that are proven reserves, about 178 billion barrels, and with new technology we'll probably be able to grow that number even larger in terms of oil in reserve, but natural gas, of course, the fields that we know are older. New technology may recover more, but I'm not sure how much. The only other decision that may affect the price of natural gas would be the northern gas, how much drilling is allowed, the cost of piping it through Alberta, you know, a new pipeline from Alaska. There are two different scenarios for pipelines. There's a lot of work being done there.

We take in the averages of the natural gas and oil prices. At the end of the year if there is a larger surplus than we expect, we call it an unbudgeted surplus. We have a very clear policy that we initiated last year, and that is that one-third will go to infrastructure, one-third will go to the maintenance of that infrastructure, and the other third will go directly to savings. That savings may be in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. It may be increasing the amount of our various endowments, which are really good savings for the future, especially when it comes to the science and ingenuity fund, our education fund. All of our scholarships are funded by endowments. So it's a good investment of our unbudgeted surpluses and really will support the same quality of life for the next generation.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. That was a very long response, but I didn't hear the answer that I had sought.

Now, on page 68 of the fiscal plan, in the table, is expense by ministry, Executive Council. I'm going to go back. We had difficulty with this concept a few budget debates previous to this afternoon. The 2006-07 actual, which is quoted in the table, indicates that there was \$22 million spent by Executive Council. For 2007-08 the budgeted was \$23 million. The forecast for 2007-08 was \$24 million. Of course, when we get to this year, the estimate is \$30 million. Then in the business plans going through to 2009-10, 2010-11, the targets are for \$36 million and \$37 million. Not only is there a \$6 million increase in the budget now, but we're looking at in the future an additional \$6 million. Is that spending increase reflected in the business plan, and is this basically ramping up the Public Affairs Bureau for the next election cycle in four years?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Chairman, the plan is to of course rebrand Alberta. We have been very successful with the Alberta advantage

brand. It still carries a lot of weight. But our hope is to look at Alberta a bit differently again. We've invested a lot in arts and culture. We've invested a lot in opportunities for the disadvantaged in the province of Alberta. We want to get the news out that Alberta is a very stable place to invest. It has, of course, stability in government, which in itself has supported larger investment in Alberta.

The increase this year is \$5 million in the Public Affairs Bureau, and next year it'll be \$10 million and \$10 million. What we're going to do this year, of course, is put it out to tender to get RFPs, requests for proposals, to see who can do the best job for the government of Alberta, for all Albertans in terms of rebranding the province. Again, it will cover all areas. We have many strengths in the province of Alberta, but if we're going to continue the same quality of life and attract investment, we've got to get out there and advertise. You know, you turn on the TV any time, and you'll see Saskatchewan advertising, B.C., Ontario, the Maritimes, all the provinces. They're actually beating us to the punch.

We want to secure as well our place in terms of tourism, which is vital. Given the fact that fuel prices are increasing dramatically and there are additional tariffs put by many of the airline companies, it may move to Albertans and Canadians spending more time in the country of Canada. That's why we've got to advertise, you know, the tremendous tourism opportunities we have: the parks, our waterways, the city of Edmonton here, with the river valley. Of course, I've got to mention Calgary at the same time, with the Stampede. I mean, there are so many things happening that we're so proud of, and we've got to get the message out.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again to the hon. Premier. I know there were many people who as representatives of the government of Alberta went down to participate in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC, and the Alberta Week that was hosted in Washington. Now, I don't know if the hon. Premier went. He was probably smart and was one of the very few Conservative people who didn't go. You were probably out selling memberships in Coronation or somewhere. I don't know what you were up to. I don't know if you were there or not. But the \$5 million campaign that you referenced: is this an admittance by this government that the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC, and the Alberta Week in Washington were not as successful as you maintained? Right after this, all of a sudden we've got to have this next stage of a campaign to sell ourselves to the world.

**Mr. Stelmach:** The Smithsonian was extremely successful, in fact, from support by the private sector and, of course, the number of Albertans volunteering their time, anything from the culinary – you know, I even had a baba from Vegreville making perogies at the Smithsonian – to the various displays. You know, many times you'll have some members of the opposition try to malign the province. They'll do anything to make it look negative. Their cup isn't only half full; it's empty all the time. I only refer to the cup. I'm going to bite my lip not to go any deeper. I can tell you that we have a tremendous opportunity again to build on what we learned at the Smithsonian.

I was there as Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on a previsit before we opened up our Washington office, and there was an offer made by the Smithsonian given that a country had agreed to host and then had backed away. This was the first time in history – the first time in history – that a provincial jurisdiction had been asked to host. Generally it's a country that hosts an

event of this sort. So we're very proud of Alberta's contribution and, most importantly, of its citizens. Again: successful. We'll continue to do whatever we can to advertise in other jurisdictions the quality of life that we enjoy in Alberta. That's why we're investing \$5 million this year, \$10 million next year, and \$10 million the year after to make sure that we successfully rebrand this province.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

3:20

**Mr. MacDonald:** Interesting.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would remind the hon. Premier that in a democracy the Official Opposition has a role to make sure that the government remains accountable. Whenever you see government spending increase at such a dramatic rate as it has, there have to be questions asked. Why is it necessary for this budget to be the way it is? You may not like it, but it's a function of democracy, and it's worked quite well.

Now, on page 70 of the fiscal plan Executive Council is again listed. We have the 2008-09 ministry expense by function, and there are many different functions here. There's a breakdown for health, education, social services, environment, general government. I'm surprised that some of your Public Affairs Bureau money wouldn't be under this title because so much of it is going to be used for the greenwashing program. Specific to economic development, if you look, for instance, at Agriculture and Rural Development, it has a billion dollars set aside in that function, but there's none for Executive Council. It's just the \$30 million. Why?

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Premier.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The earlier comment with respect to the role of opposition is exactly right. The role of opposition in a democratic government is very important, but it's not to be subversive. There's a big difference. It's a big difference. Once again, you hear comments made that are not just critical of government, but they lead to innuendo. Unfortunately, this kind of behaviour extends past this Assembly, which has a tremendous history, more than a hundred-year history. If you want to play that game, I can play it.

In terms of the \$25 million, that will be invested in the Public Affairs Bureau to rebrand the province. It will be there, and I will defend it no matter how much the opposition wants to degrade the province of Alberta, and I'll continue to do it because I am very proud of my province. I share the pride of every member in this Assembly. If they don't have that same pride, well, that's up to them, but I do, and so do my colleagues.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Certainly, no member on this side of the House degrades Alberta, and for the Premier to suggest that is completely off base.

Now, getting to the national Portrait Gallery, on page 113 of the fiscal plan. Is the Premier's office involved in this \$40 million budget amount, and what will happen to this money if neither Calgary nor Edmonton are successful? Where will this \$40 million go? Will it go into another propaganda campaign?

**Mr. Stelmach:** We don't have a propaganda campaign, so I don't know what he's saying about another one. I'm not clear.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Now, the hon. Premier stated earlier that the McDougall Centre is under the control of Executive Council. In the budget year that

we're discussing, 2007-08, can the Official Opposition or members of the third party use the McDougall Centre? If not, why not?

**Mr. Stelmach:** It's government; it's not opposition. The McDougall Centre is operated by government. You know, opposition members are invited from time to time to different meetings, et cetera, but it is operated by the government of Alberta.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Chairman, to the hon. Premier: have the rules changed since last fall? Can members of the Official Opposition or members of the third party go to McDougall Centre, for instance, and host and participate in a press conference?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I'm not quite sure what the question was. Repeat it.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Can the members of the Official Opposition or members of the third party in this current fiscal year go to the McDougall Centre and host and participate in a press conference?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I'll get back to him. Every time I do a press conference, the opposition is out there in great number, and then they're responding . . .

**Mr. Mason:** All two of us.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Well, that's not my fault. That's not my fault.

They participate in news conferences. I'm not quite sure, but I will get back to him.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. We're getting so far.

Now, government client satisfaction. The hon. Premier spoke earlier about the need to communicate with Albertans, not only the subversive kind but all Albertans. In the past the Public Affairs Bureau has issued a series of performance measures, and these performance measures indicate that government client satisfaction levels with communication services provided by the Public Affairs Bureau are going down. For instance, if we look at 2006-07, we see the target was a 95 per cent satisfaction rate, but the actual satisfaction rate was 88 per cent. Can the Premier please tell us why this performance measure specifically was not met and how much of the money that is being allocated to the Public Affairs Bureau is going to try to fix this problem?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Chairman, a target of 75 per cent is a very high target, especially for a government. Of course, our targets are high, and we're going to continue to work towards that. I think the satisfaction survey we had on March 3 gave us a good indication that we're communicating fairly well with Albertans in spite of the fact that, you know, we had another big campaign against us, not of any political party but, again, \$2.2 million, a third party. So there was a lot of communication going on, but obviously we got our message across.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. That is a good segue into the next question. Now, this Albertans for Change campaign that the Premier made reference to: what role are the Public Affairs Bureau and the Premier's office playing in drafting legislation that may restrict or limit third-party advertising?

**Mr. Stelmach:** The Public Affairs Bureau doesn't draft legislation. You know, that's not the responsibility of the Public Affairs Bureau.

With respect to the third-party advertising I'm glad that the member raised it. I said in this Legislature that I'll work with the two opposition parties. As I said before, when I was going through the leadership along with my colleagues, there was such a demand to put together some sort of a disclosure policy or leadership disclosure legislation. Given the fact that there may be some coming in the very near future, I'm going to work with the two opposition parties to make sure it's in place before they go to a leadership.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes, Mr. Chairman. There's a big difference between disclosure and full disclosure, as the hon. Premier fully well knows.

Now, getting back to the performance measures. The Premier may have been confused between the client satisfaction performance measure that's issued by the Public Affairs Bureau and the government communications performance measure. The government communications performance measure rates Albertans' satisfaction with information they received directly from government about programs and services. The target was 75 per cent for this performance measure, but the actual was 64 per cent. Can the Premier tell the House what amount of money in the budget for Executive Council is going to again try to improve government communications?

3:30

**Mr. Stelmach:** Part of the budget increases go to improving communications with Albertans. We did something different this year in terms of communicating with Albertans, and that is on a quarterly basis issuing the Report to Albertans that we either stuffed in papers or delivered to the households. The reason we did that is that we had a lot of good news to share. These were all commitments that I had made during the leadership and, of course, commitments we made as a government in the first 12 to 14 months. We delivered on all of them, especially the elimination of health care premiums and increasing the daycare spaces to 14,000.

We talked about the Alberta enterprise fund and that the legislation is before the House and expected to be passed this spring. Something quite dear to me is the community spirit program, which, again, is a program where Alberta leads, compared to other provinces, where we will support those nonprofit volunteer agencies in their goals. Of course, the introduction of the tax credit – 50 cents on the dollar for donations of \$200 or more – has really kept a lot of money in the province, Albertans actually contributing to those causes which they are comfortable supporting rather than giving the money to the government and then redistributing it. What some say is a revenue loss in taxes, \$80 million, is 80 million plus dollars that went to various not-for-profit agencies that are doing good work for us.

We talked about tax credits for families, and our budget is before this House. We also talked about infrastructure, and of course immediately after the election of the Premier in December we moved very quickly on improving and putting additional resources into infrastructure in Fort McMurray.

We completed the royalty review, and again this government took a firm stand. We said that we were going to do it, and then we delivered on our commitment. We made it public as soon as I received the report. As you know, the resources are owned by Albertans. It was something that many said could not be done. Well, we did it, and at least we took a position on it along with the third party. We knew where we stood on it.

The 20-year capital plan articulates a very comprehensive plan for the construction of infrastructure in the province of Alberta, something that's been on the books for about 50 years, I suspect, but we've taken the bull by the horns, so to speak, and we've initiated the capital region growth management plan. The committee has had their first meeting and is proceeding quite well under the chairmanship of Chris Sheard.

I remember going through the debates in this House a number of years ago saying that this will never work, and here it's positioned Alberta as taking the leadership, and that is in the climate change and emissions management program. The other day we were proud to communicate to Albertans that in just the first year of operations, 2.6 million tonnes of actual greenhouse gas reductions. That's like taking about 550,000 cars off provincial highways, so that's quite an accomplishment. We're proud of it, and we're going to continue to communicate that to Albertans.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member. And we're continuing with the second 10 minutes of that 20-minute segment.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, the Premier is talking about royalty rates, and certainly everyone across the province had an opinion on that. I'm looking at the royalty assumptions in the fiscal plan, and the Premier was talking about this. With the Premier's plan – and the forecasts are done with your numbers, not anyone else's – with your assumptions we're going to see a reduction in the percentage per barrel of royalties that we collect on bitumen. We're going to have a large revenue stream, but this will conceal the smaller royalty rate, and these are after the changes to Alberta's royalty regime in January 2009. We will collect less on bitumen as a percentage. Can the Premier explain why this is such a good deal for Albertans, the owners of the resource?

**Mr. Stelmach:** This is a movement from synthetic to bitumen. Here's perhaps the best time to talk about the pricing of oil. Whenever we see west Texas intermediate oil at \$120 a barrel, there are many who think that that's what we receive for the sale of our oil. That is not true. Conventional oil, Alberta oil, is discounted about 10 per cent, bitumen 40 per cent, sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on pipeline capacity and, of course, the demand and upgrading and refinery capacity on the North American continent. So there are a number of variances, but we're actually going to be receiving more overall royalties in the province of Alberta with respect to the changes.

Now, we are upgrading about 61 to 62 per cent of the 1.3 million, 1.4 million barrels produced daily. Our goal, as production increases to 4 million barrels a day, is to upgrade about 70 to 72, 73 per cent of the total production. Of course, we're going to take bitumen and we'd like to see some of that go to merchant upgraders in the province of Alberta, where we can actually upgrade it and receive a greater value for it.

The other big challenge is to make sure that the upgraders that are planned, both that are on the ground being constructed today and the options that are out there for various companies that want to invest in Alberta, are done in a very environmentally sustainable way, and that's why we're in the middle of two cumulative environmental emissions studies. One is in Fort McMurray and the other one in the Fort Saskatchewan area. We have a lot of work to do in upgrading more of the bitumen in Alberta, but it's going to provide long-term jobs well into the future, not only the next generation but the generation after. We have tremendous opportunity, and the royalty structure that's in place today gives us those options.

You know, speaking about royalties, a couple of times we heard

from the opposition that we tore up Crown lease agreements. That certainly is not true. Those agreements were renegotiated a number of times at the request of companies, especially when oil prices really plummeted and we had to find ways of supporting and sharing with the companies during some very difficult times. Now that we're in an upswing, the royalty framework that we have in place will increase the price, and we'll also, of course, receive lower royalties if the price of oil drops. But certainly on the uptake and given that projections by some economists are that oil will increase above \$120 a barrel, it gives us some options for the future, but again unless it's sold, let's not put all our, you know, eggs in one basket. We've got to make sure that we still plan, be prudent in our financial planning, and make sure that we have a bit of a cushion so that in case something does happen, a catastrophic event around the world which drives the economy down across the world, we have that cushion. It's about \$7 billion in the sustainability fund, and once again it's quite unique. But it is a good idea that will help cushion the blow if we see some disruption in the economy someplace.

3:40

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. I would encourage the hon. Premier to have a look at either Syncrude, Suncor, or any one of the joint venture partners' annual or quarterly reports, and he will see where synthetic crude oil clearly trades above the west Texas intermediate measure, so the first part of your response, to say the least, was not completely accurate, nor was the fact that the Official Opposition have been indicating that agreements have been torn up. I believe you were indicating going back to 1992, and I would remind you again that in 2006-07 according to your assumptions in your budget – these are your numbers – the royalty for bitumen would be 13.7 per cent; the following year, 2007-08, it would be 14.7 per cent; 2008-09, 14.3 per cent, and then it declines on a percentage per barrel basis to 9.3 per cent in 2009-10. So that is certainly not going up. The production volume is going up, but as a percentage, using your calculations – and hopefully the price of bitumen remains quite high, and we can start to get a fair share in royalty revenue for Albertans, who own the resource.

Now, there have been many programs transferred from the Executive Council over the years. The latest and greatest I think would be the transfer of the CIA, or the corporate internal audit services. I believe they've gone to the President of the Treasury Board.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member and hon. Premier, this is the end of the second set of 20-minute questions back and forth. Do you wish to continue, or does one of the other members of the Official Opposition wish to continue?

**Mr. MacDonald:** I will continue with this question, and then the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East will take over.

**The Deputy Chair:** The 20 minutes is over. You can ask questions later on, after the second hour.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you very much. I actually just have three points that I'd like to make, and they have to do with the openness and transparency that this government is presumably working towards. On page 135 there's a performance measure on how the public is satisfied. I'd just like to share some instances where I think that the

public aren't satisfied. Sixty-four per cent are, which means that 36 per cent aren't. I'm sure that you can all appreciate that in constituency offices we get the 36 per cent, and part of the problem is in obtaining FOIP documents.

I had a family that needed documents for an appeal in terms of trying to get extra dollars for their autistic child, and they were told that they would have to FOIP their own children's health care records. They fortunately scrounged money from their parents in order to be able to pay for that. I'm not sure that that is open and transparent.

I probably don't have too much of a problem with actually providing those documents at cost, which would be the paper and probably the use of the copying machine; however, in terms of the research and the actual physical printing of the document, I mean, this is what these people's jobs are. Why are they being paid double? They're already being paid to do the job, and having the person that's asking for the FOIP documents pay for them again is really double-dipping, I think, on that particular FOIP, and it definitely makes it difficult for people to get the FOIP. I'm not talking about whatever secret documents that everybody else tries to get; I'm only trying to get documents for my constituents.

I'll leave it there. I do think that the process of FOIP should be looked at, and I'd really like to ask if the Premier is considering looking at that.

**Mr. Stelmach:** For this particular matter I'm not quite sure what the situation is, but I would suggest that you take it up with the Privacy Commissioner. With the documents centred around health and having had people come into the constituency office over the years, you've got to be careful in terms of who wants to obtain them for what purpose. I don't know the situation, but my suggestion is to bring it to the Privacy Commissioner.

I don't have all of the information, but overall with the freedom of information and protection of privacy office, although there are fees attached, they're far less than the total cost to the taxpayer of this province. It's not in my department, so I don't know the exact breakdown. But I can assure you that it is a cost to the taxpayer. Fine. You know, the act was passed here in the Legislature. I think it was Bill 1 in 1993, when we came back here in July. But there are other issues. If the hon. member herself can bring that to the Privacy Commissioner, or if you need some further collaboration, we'll chat. If there's something we have to do in the area of health, then we'll do it. I know it's sensitive as to who gets what information because it's between whoever the health care provider was – there are some rules and regulations there – and the patient as well.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. Thank you for that, Mr. Premier. Actually, the problem itself has been solved, and I was using that as an example. I guess my point was that I really think that some of the FOIP pages that are being produced are really being produced not at cost. I think there is money over and above what I believe should be the cost. I think that FOIP documents should be provided at cost. Some of the work that the people do is what they're being paid to do, so I don't think they need to be paid twice for their time.

The second point that I would like to make, again in terms of open communication, starts on page 132 in the business plan where the words say that the government of Alberta is recognized "for having an innovative public service which provides high quality policy analysis and advice to support elected officials." Then on page 133 it goes on to say that the "policy clearly defines what Albertans can expect in terms of communicating with their government, and

provides guidance to employees,” which in this point I’m going to use as constituency staff, “in developing and delivering programs.”

One of the things that I think is not open and transparent is in terms of how the opposition constituency staff is being treated. I can have a constituent come into my office and ask me to do a couple of things. I either forward their letter to the minister under my signature, or they forward the letter to the minister or the Premier or to whomever and I am copied. I could well be copied with other people, other stakeholders, or perhaps other MLAs. When the answer comes back, it never comes back to my constituency. So my staff never knows unless the constituent – and most of them do – brings the answer back. The last one was just a couple of days ago, and he said to me: what kind of shenanigans are going on? I said: well, I’m going to ask the Premier what kind of shenanigans are going on when my constituent has to bring back the answer when, in fact, I was clearly copied.

That’s been, actually, an ongoing problem. I’ve never really had a chance to bring it up, so I thought I would take this opportunity to ask. I don’t know whether that comes under the public relations department or just who would be in charge of that. I’m not sure.

Under Values, again on page 132, it talks about integrity: “We behave ethically and are open, honest and fair.” I don’t believe that it’s fair to a fellow colleague that sits in this House that’s trying to do the job. We all have different jobs to do, and I believe that we should be doing them fairly to each other. I don’t think that’s fair. So I’d like a comment on that.

3:50

**Mr. Stelmach:** There are a couple of points here, one with respect to fees. What happens is that when a request is made, there is an estimate of the hours required. The printing costs are minimal, but it’s an investment of government staff, first of all, to access the records, research them, make sure that the information that’s provided falls within the law. I can assure you that the fees that we collect are not anywhere near the cost to the government. It’s not my department, but I will get the exact cost.

Now, with respect to letters, we’d have to have a look at it. I know that if a letter comes to me directly as the Premier about an issue – and it might be from, I don’t know, Grande Prairie-Wapiti or whatever, a constituent of that area – if that member is not CCed, the reply will not be, you know. Again, we’ll have a look at it. When I was minister, we’d CC it to whatever riding, constituency. Of course, the work we were doing in Infrastructure was probably completely different. I don’t know what the issue is. If it’s child custody, if it’s health related, there are some different rules and regulations. If you can bring that specific example, I’ll have a look at it.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for that, Mr. Premier. I guess, really, the whole point is that I believe that when we’re CCed at the bottom, we should receive the same reply that everyone else does to that letter.

Just one last thing that I’d like to talk about: democracy. This has always been something that has been a bit of a passion for me. One of the things, I guess, that I would like to know is on the public relations department. How do they feel about and would we ever be going forward in terms of having a citizens’ assembly to find out or do some homework on: would it help increase voter participation if they felt that their vote actually would work out, particularly in our parliamentary system, to the seats in the House reflecting the numbers that had cast votes, which I’m sure you’re more than aware of? There are any number of ways of doing that.

I believe it’s something that people want. I’ve certainly heard

many, many people talking about it, and there has been some university agitation over having a citizens’ assembly not necessarily with the mandate of perhaps changing, but let’s talk about it, and let’s see what happens. I think it’s quite clear that in this country and in this province we will never go back to a two-party system. Therefore, first past the post doesn’t really reflect. First past the post would reflect a two-party system as opposed to votes that are distributed in a different manner.

Those were really my three concerns at this point in time. If you could just make a comment on that, I’d be happy.

**Mr. Stelmach:** With respect to two parties or three parties I don’t know for a fact – nobody has asked me – but apparently there’s some discussion that was headed by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to bring two together. If you’re successful, fine; I guess we’ll have two parties. He wants to create a fourth one? Okay. Whatever happens happens.

You know, I’m always open to suggestions. I know that this election there was a good debate in terms of various policy alternatives. We held the election, and we got the results.

I travel to different parts of the province. I ask people: what can we do to increase voter participation? Many of them, you know, especially younger people, said: “Well, you know, life is good. I don’t know. It won’t change.” So there is nothing there to say: we’re all going to band together and kick the government out for whatever reason. If you look at Alberta historically, large voter participation happened, I believe, in 1935. About 80 per cent of Albertans showed up to vote because in 1935 a lot of Albertans were really hungry. There were some really serious economic issues in the province of Alberta, and they came not to elect a government but to boot the preceding government out.

But all of these can go under consideration and debate in the House in the future sometime.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. leader of the NDP opposition.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to ask the Premier questions about his budget, and I look forward to his answers. I’d like to start with one of my favourite parts of the Premier’s budget every year, the Public Affairs Bureau. There’s a \$20 million expenditure in that, and I’d like to know how many full-time equivalents this represents in the Public Affairs Bureau and how they’re broken down. I would also like to know how many communications professionals that have a relationship with the Public Affairs Bureau there are in all of the other departments of government. It’s an interesting structure that’s used where there are people from the Public Affairs Bureau that are working within individual departments doing communications work. My question really is not only how many of those are there and of what types, but how many other similar types of professional people in communications are there working in government that aren’t listed on the books of the Public Affairs Bureau but are listed, you know, as employees of the individual departments. If I could get a breakdown of where they are and how many there are.

I wonder if the Premier can tell us about the size of the budget in the Public Affairs Bureau and how much this government spends on communications professionals relative to, you know, some other provinces. I don’t really care about very small ones but equivalent ones – British Columbia, maybe even Manitoba or Ontario or Quebec – whether we spend, really, more on that or less than other governments.

I’d like to know how the government handles public opinion research, whether or not public opinion research in the government

is co-ordinated by the Public Affairs Bureau or whether it's undertaken by them or whether or not individual departments do that. If the Premier could let me know, you know, what the budget is specifically for public opinion research. How much was spent on public opinion research in the last year and, perhaps, the year before? What is the breakdown of the kinds of surveys that were done? What was their nature, and how effective does the government find that as a tool to judge the public's mood and its opinions on different government initiatives, whether or not they feel that that's worth while?

So that would be my first set of questions. Then if we can go back and forth a little bit, Mr. Chairman, I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

**Mr. Stelmach:** In terms of the FTE equivalents, I'll read them off for the record, and then we'll also follow it up with a letter to the member. Before I do, maybe we'll have a little wager here. I'll wager lunch. I think B.C.'s is bigger; you may think it's smaller, but we'll wager lunch on it, and then we'll talk Saskatchewan and maybe have another lunch. [interjection] Well, I know you'd know Manitoba's. I know where it's at in Manitoba, too. I also know that Manitoba gets \$2 billion from equalization and \$1.2 billion by subsidizing hydro. I wonder how many Public Affairs Bureau people they need to do that.

4:00

Anyway, Executive Council has 180 FTEs, an increase of 5 per cent over the prior year. Two of the new FTEs are related to the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. Three additional staff in the Public Affairs Bureau work on the development and implementation of the Alberta-brand campaign. Once again, it's put the RFP together and opened it up to all proposals that will come to the government, almost like a tender process. The totals include 61 staff in the office of the Premier/Executive Council and 119 in the Public Affairs Bureau. Sixty-one staff in the office of the Premier/Executive Council provide a number of services, including running my offices in Calgary and Edmonton, correspondence and communication, organizational and administrative support to cabinet and its key committees, strategic policy and planning co-ordination for government, implementation of the board governance review recommendations, co-ordination for visiting foreign delegations – and we've certainly had many these last couple of years – and administrative and communications support for the Lieutenant Governor.

Staffing for the Public Affairs Bureau: 91. It's 119 FTEs, but 91 are strategic communications staff who plan and implement communications initiatives, provide a range of communication services and ministries, co-ordinate government communications for major initiatives and during public emergencies, develop and implement a brand campaign, support internal government communications, and provide advertising and corporate identity co-ordination. Sixteen staff provide communications support services to ministries, including the website, news release distribution, electronic media monitoring, and technical services for news conferences. Twelve staff provide corporate services to Executive Council and the bureau, including human resources, finance, administrative, business planning, annual reports, records management, and FOIP. This also includes the Public Affairs Bureau's managing director's office.

PAB last year: about a quarter of a million dollars, \$250,000, for public opinion research. Now, there are other departments that do pay on their own for research in various areas, you know, some of the leading topics in health or maybe, well, environment would be some. I know that when I was in Agriculture, we used to do some directly to farmers as well in terms of some of the programs and then getting the information out.

With respect to various government programs I can tell you that we've got to do a lot. We've got to keep communicating because there are many programs, especially for seniors – you find you meet with seniors and they're not aware of what's available unless there's someone in the community to inform them or maybe at the lodge or at the long-term care institution.

Now, with respect to performance measurements we do public opinion research. It's really intended to develop a long-term research plan, a strategic plan for the province. We need that information from a variety of sources. We do use public opinion research. It does help us get a larger, a full picture of various issues. It is a strategy that's used by all governments, provincial and federal, to make sure that they have unfiltered feedback from the public. There is some polling to measure progress and see where the public is at on various issues. Again, if it's funded by the taxpayer, then all of this research is public. It's FOIPable. I think that by reaching out to Albertans and doing a fair amount of polling and research on a number of topics, it has helped us build a number of good policies for Alberta. I agree that there are places where we need more information, but in others we've done extremely well, and we've just got to continue doing that to reach out to Albertans.

I think I got all three, but I will follow up with a letter as well.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. leader.

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I see my time is now already half over. I had three other areas I was going to ask questions on. I may as well just go through them, and the Premier can deal with them as best he can and, hopefully, provide us with the information that he doesn't get to in a letter.

I'm interested in the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. I wonder if the Premier can tell us a little bit about how it's put together, how it operates, what sorts of things it is looking at, what sort of support it gets from the administration, and what its progress has been to date. I'd be very interested in what the main areas are that it's looking at. I'd just like to know generally a little bit more about it.

The administrative support for the Lieutenant Governor's office comes under here, but I didn't see the numbers for that broken out in any way, so I wonder if we could learn a little bit more about that.

There has been an issue that's been ongoing for a number of years about the Lieutenant Governor's residence. I don't really know where I would find that elsewhere in the budget, so I'll ask it here. I know that just before the election the \$3 million residence was – I don't know if it was actually cancelled, but the issue was managed; that's for sure. I'd like to know what the plans are for that and whether or not the Premier really believes that the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta needs a \$3 million residence and what other opportunities there might be to make sure that he gets something which is in keeping with his station but isn't an extravagance on the taxpayer.

I'd like to also raise the issue of election finance reform because I think this is an important issue and something that I certainly raised in the last election in a major way, focusing mostly on corporate and union donations. Also, we talked about limitations on third-party advertising. In case the Premier was, you know, not clear on where we stood on that, that's something that we'd be interested in pursuing and working on with the government. It's our view that during an election the main conversation has to be between the political parties and between the political parties and the voters. I think that that's essential to a proper debate in the election. So I'd be interested in that.

Of course, the Premier knows that we're also very interested in bringing in leadership campaigns within the same set of rules that

govern political parties and political campaigns. I would add further that nomination meetings should be considered. They're all part of the broader political process. They're all part of our party political system that we have in this province, and it seems to me we need to have the same set of rules for all of them.

I mean, we're faced with a dilemma because while we think that individual citizens, either directly or through some government formula of government financing, should be financing the political process in the province, we also are realistic enough to realize that the Conservative Party has access to a great deal of finances that are not available to others, so it's a bit like asking the government to, you know, eliminate their advantage. But I would just make the case that, in the end, if the government of the day was freed from that, they would have a lot more independence in terms of doing what's right for the province without having to look over their shoulder about the political financing. So, in the long run, I think there's a really good argument to be made that, in fact, that kind of change would be beneficial.

4:10

I wanted to go back to the Public Affairs Bureau. One thing I forgot to ask, Mr. Chairman, is that projected expenditures in '08-09 and '09-10 show a significant jump in spending, and I would like to know why that is under consideration, why that longer term plan is there.

Those are all my questions, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Okay. With respect to the Lieutenant Governor the '08-09 budget is \$517,000. The manpower component is \$415,000. That's four FTEs. We'll put that in a letter. Supplies and services: \$102,000. Supplies and services are travel hosting expenses in relation to the office supplies. Both Honours spend so much time on the road. They're really tremendous ambassadors for this province. They spend a lot of time with children and sports activities. They're doing a tremendously good job for all Albertans.

Now, the Lieutenant Governor's salary is paid for by the federal government, and the residence is within Infrastructure. I do know that there is a delay as the construction of the residence was held back a bit only because costs kept escalating, and we had to put money into other priority areas, but we are continuing with the construction of the residence. It's really a tremendous supporter of tradition. I mean, it's not very often you have Alberta's only living sports legend serving as the Lieutenant Governor. I hope he reads that someplace, or maybe we'll send it to him.

The budget increase. The one is for the Public Affairs Bureau, and of course \$1 million is for the Council for Economic Strategy. Then \$5 million is for the PAB this year. Then next year it'll be \$10 million, followed by \$10 million the following year. Again, it's part of the overall rebranding project for the province.

With respect to the Premier's council it's all about a long-term strategy for the province of Alberta. I'm, you know, very bullish on this province, not only for the next quarter but certainly for the next quarter century. As I said earlier, we cannot depend on the revenue streams that we've become so used to for agriculture, forestry, and oil and gas. Agriculture is certainly going through some difficult issues and so is forestry, and our revenue stream depends a lot on the success of the oil and gas industry.

I just think that we have the best opportunity while we're living through some good economic times to move to a knowledge-based economy, and a lot of that will come from the experiences of others, those that have grown their economy, broadened their tax base, countries like Korea and Ireland. Let's hear from people that have that expertise; come to Alberta. It will be term certain. It won't keep on going and going but be term certain so that we can build a long-term policy on it.

Now, you know, we've done a lot in terms of taxes in the province of Alberta. We do have the lowest tax rate. We have the highest exemption. But is that enough to carry us in the future? I don't believe so. If we compare the number of PhDs in the province to other jurisdictions, we're low. If you look at the number of grad students, we're low.

With the number of ideas that leave the province of Alberta to other jurisdictions, again, we're just not commercializing the amount of research that we should in the province. I'll use the nanotechnology centre for one example. If I remember correctly, one-third of the investment in the nanotechnology centre came from Alberta taxpayers, another was from the federal government, and the other third from NSERC, which is, again, government dollars. Oil, I think, at that time was \$19 a barrel. So it was a significant investment at a very critical time in Alberta's history. Now, good research is being done. We're all supporting it through Alberta tax dollars. We've attracted some of the world's best, but when the research leaves this province and is commercialized someplace else, we don't get the tax benefit. So we're feeding the machine at this end with dollars, but we're not getting the rest.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I would like to thank the hon. Premier and his staff for being here today. It's always good to have these discussions and to get the honest answers right from the Premier and his staff. I also want to commend the Premier for his leadership in making the economic future and sustainability of this province of the utmost importance and a priority of this government. If there is one thing that we can leave behind, it is a legacy of opportunities for future generations, and I think that's very important.

I think that the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy is a great initiative. However, I do have a couple of questions about that. I know that today we heard a lot about the next generation economy and a knowledge-based economy. What that means is people, and if we're talking about our knowledge-based economy into the future, what we're talking about is today's students, today's younger generation. You know, I have the fortunate perspective of being part of that younger generation, a younger generation that has gone through significant changes and seen significant changes in our world. How they apply that to how they see their role in society, their role in the economy I think is going to be very important as we move ahead. So we're talking about people.

I know that right now we're in a great position, but we're not without our challenges, particularly on the labour side, particularly on the skilled labour side. We're certainly facing pressures from provinces like Saskatchewan competing for the best and the brightest as well as just a sufficient number of skilled people. There are a number of things that can be used to attract these types of people that aren't just, you know, salaries and those types of things. It's the sort of culture of the province and of our society, to be inclusive and to say that we're listening to your concerns.

My first question would be on the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. What sorts of specific strategies are going to be employed to really engage this new generation of thinkers, innovators, entrepreneurs, and skilled workers and make sure that they want to make Alberta the place to work and do business? That's certainly a passion of mine. I certainly think that we have the right foundation in place, but we need to go above and beyond that. That's my first question.

My second question – and it was already asked or alluded to today – is whether the government is getting involved in the business of business. I certainly think that that's a very fine line to be walking.

You know, at times we need to let the market take control, and at times we need to be very strategic in the direction that we want to go. I notice as part of the business plan that the performance measurements are under development for goal 1, under which this strategy fits. I'm wondering what sorts of measurements we are going to put in place to make sure that we are instituting the right balance of letting the market take its natural progression. You know, a lot of economists will refer to that as sort of the invisible hand type of concept. As well, how do we know that the government is doing the right thing as far as getting involved in being a partner with industry in some of these things?

Mr. Chairman, those are my two questions.

4:20

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Premier.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you. One thing about the province of Alberta is that we've been able to attract a lot of new Albertans with a real, traditional can-do attitude. We've actually built the province substantially since the NEP, the national energy program, which some of us still remember. We've recovered considerably since then. We learned a lot from that, and that is that you always have to keep broadening your tax base.

Now, to do that, there are a number of things that have to be done. One, of course, is tax policy. Again, compared to other Canadian jurisdictions, we are the lowest. Can we change it in some way? We will receive advice from the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy in terms of tax policy, both short term and long range, how we can attract more people to the province. Now, today we see the results because we do have a younger population compared to other jurisdictions, but what do we have to do to attract more people to Alberta? So tax policy is one.

Housing is another. I know you alluded to new Albertans. Well, from the business community we're hearing that, you know, we could commercialize some of the new ideas from research in Alberta, but we can't find the people, and those that we are attracting can't find a place to live. Things have slowed down a bit in the housing market. It's not as rapid an increase. There are more houses available for purchasing. But, again, we've got to look at it more long term. I would say that as you attract more people to the province, you have to provide more public services as a government. I mean, that's what people rely on. They expect that. In the area of health, some of the lower skills, with the salaries that people receive today, they won't be able to afford an \$800,000 condo or \$400,000. So, you know, housing is critical.

The other one is retention. Alberta today has the lowest retention of immigrants of any province in Canada. Our goal is to reach about 90 per cent, meaning that you have to reach out to new Albertans, make them feel welcome. It's not only English as a Second Language and housing. We've got to reach out to each and every group so that they feel that they're part of Alberta. That's why we brought about significant changes in arts and culture policy. You know, you attract more people through a successful arts and culture policy, but you also reach out to new Albertans. With respect to arts and culture we've clearly heard, when we're attracting the world's brightest, two questions. First, what's the quality of your postsecondary education in the province of Alberta? Secondly, they always ask about the quality of arts and culture. Those are two that go hand in hand.

Now, with respect to being in business, it was raised a number of times. To give you a comparison, our province's share of venture capital in Canada is about 1 per cent. B.C. I think is 44 per cent; Ontario, 19 per cent. They are getting more of the new ideas commercialized within those respective provinces. So how is it that we can put together a venture capital fund but do it at arm's length,

not government making the decisions but world experts in various fields to choose the right ideas? Will there be failures? Probably. But I can tell you that there will also be huge success. Again, you can't get there without significant investment in education and increasing the number of graduate students in Alberta and also PhDs.

Having met with the ambassador from Ireland, their goal is to double the PhDs in the next 10 years in Ireland. They're going to be out around the world. South Korea now has one of the highest per capita incomes. It took years to get there. They started in the '60s, '70s, then a huge investment in education. Again, quality of life – I don't know, never been there – in terms of how it compares to Alberta, but they have attracted a lot of people to build various industry and create new patents, new ideas.

We have a real opportunity here. We've certainly learned from the past. I know there are some saying: ah, you know, it's not the way to go. Well, we either listen to the success stories of other jurisdictions and build on that experience, or we'll be left in the dust. Who knows what will happen to oil and gas? I'm not talking about changes next year or the year after. I'm talking about 15, 20 years from now, 30 years from now in terms of how the world economy will change and the position that Alberta will have.

Further to that, more value-added. I can tell you that 48 per cent of our GDP, at least a couple of years ago, was moved underground, was moved by pipeline. Well, you add more value. Is it all going to be moved by pipeline, or do we need a new transportation plan for Alberta and western Canada because it's going to value-added? It has to get to a coast somewhere. Already, you know, we can't get it to Vancouver because we're plugged. There isn't additional capacity, so the concept of a Port Alberta, tying it to Prince Rupert makes sense. That's the kind of vision we'd like to put together for Alberta.

Part of that overall vision, I think, once we receive that information as a government, then we look at how to build a larger western economic marketplace. With B.C., certainly, the time is right with the legislation that is going through the House, TILMA, labour mobility, investment, which is important. If we sit down and do similar with Saskatchewan, we're not going to force them to do it all, but pick some of the lower hanging fruit, certainly on transportation.

I mean, I used this example the other day at the chamber meeting. Animals were hungry in northern B.C. because of significant drought. Alberta farmers donating hay, paying for the transportation were stopped at the Alberta-B.C. border because the bails weren't stacked the B.C. way. They were stacked the Alberta way, and they were declared to be unsafe on a B.C. highway. Nonsense. It's 2008, and it's all under the veil of safety. It's got nothing to do with safety. In cases it's job protection, and our economy is much too small to compete with Europe and Asia, especially at this time.

To give you an example of some of the low-hanging fruit, when we first met as joint cabinet with B.C., we harmonized our trucking regulations. We have now one vehicle inspection station on highway 3. It's on the B.C. side, but it doesn't matter. You're scaling a truck, a kilogram's a kilogram this side of the border or that side, and a safe brake is a safe brake. It's an engineering test. You know, it's not subjective to anything. What does it save? It saves that shipper and the manufacturer a considerable amount of money because they stop once. Yet the integrity of the safety program is maintained. Those are the kind of ideas we need.

Economists will tell us that this issue of internal trade within Canada costs us about 1 per cent of the total GDP. You know, a few years ago they predicted \$14 billion, but most of the economists today are around that \$7 billion annual costs to our economy because we can't harmonize internal trade in the country of Canada.

In speaking to the ambassador, at least a 50 million people

marketplace, and you can buy one licence plate and drive across the country, one permit. Here you can't travel between provinces without getting a special permit, and we're wondering why our economy is slipping. Thank you for allowing me to vent, but those are the kinds of issues that we've got deal with as a government.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

4:30

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the hon. Premier and his staff for being here this afternoon to bring us up to date.

I guess I'd just sort of like to start my question on strategy 1.6: "Implement the recommendations from the Board Governance Review to improve the transparency, accountability and governance of government agencies, boards and commissions." I was wondering whether these recommendations have been implemented and whether we're seeing them go into many boards across this province.

I know there was some talk, and I read in the paper – this was probably before my coming to government – of some boards being primarily made up of members of the Conservative Party or the like, whether that was by hook or by crook or by luck or whatever the chance is. I was wondering if these implementations have been put together to look at sort of getting a more diversified mix of people on our boards and what the Premier's strategy is in this regard in his department.

**Mr. Stelmach:** That's a good question. In fact, we undertook the public agencies governance review. That's all agencies, boards, and commissions within the province of Alberta. The report was delivered to me last year. We had three members on the board that were very objective and gave us a number of recommendations, I think 15. There were 15 recommendations promoting good governance among the agencies.

We adopted the report in January, and the focus will be on maintaining a very comprehensive, up-to-date inventory of all the agencies, promoting competency-based appointments to agencies, and also assisting in developing clear roles and mandate documents for the agencies. We want to know that if we have a board or agency there, the people on the board are competent, and it doesn't matter if it's, let's say, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation or any other board or commission that has been appointed to do a very specific task.

There are about 200 agencies, boards, commissions in the province, and the reason this was so important to this government is that they manage over 50 per cent of the government's annual operating expenses. That's why we're going to be very thorough in this area.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you very much. Also, going back to my time before government, I know there was some development with all-party committees. One of those all-party committees or task forces was the housing task force, and to be honest with you, I was quite disappointed in the number of recommendations that the Premier took from that. I was wondering if there are any plans in the future for when these task forces are put together, whether they're going to have a little more say, whether the Premier intends just to pick and choose where he likes, or whether you're trusting these all-party committees to go away and put together some serious work with all the members at the table sitting there and really take their advice. I don't really see the point in it unless the government is going to take these task forces seriously when they go away. I'd just like to hear your comments on that.

**Mr. Stelmach:** The government does take seriously, of course, the recommendations coming from the all-party task forces, but at the end of the day government has to make the decision, not the appointed task force.

The question with respect to housing. There was a recommendation, of course, to put a cap on rent: rent control. I tell you that I don't support it. Our government doesn't support it and for very good reason. We've talked to other Premiers – these are Premiers of other political persuasions – that said: "Please. You're free of it in Alberta. Don't move in that direction. We can't rebuild parts of our cities, parts of our communities, because nobody is going to invest where there is absolutely zero return on the investment in renewing, refurbishing the property."

This is new to Alberta. It hasn't happened before in terms of all-party committees. It's a first step. I think it's allowing all parties to participate, but at the end of the day in a democratic process government has to make the decision. Again, I continue to defend the position we took on housing. But there are going to be other topics that are going to be tackled by the all-party committees, and I'm looking forward to their recommendations.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you very much. I look at some of the business plan, and there on page 134 it states that Albertans "have a right to receive clear facts about the issues faced by the province." Of course, this is just a broad-based goal. Given this stated commitment to a more open and transparent government, does the Premier have any more envisioned? Just looking back at some of the messaging coming out of the Public Affairs Bureau, from my standpoint it looks more like a cheerleading exercise. I realize that might be part of the exercise of the Public Affairs Bureau, and maybe to a certain extent we need that sort of support.

Nevertheless, I see some of the advertisements. After the royalty review you were on a thing saying: I made a promise, and I delivered. I don't really know if that's educating the Alberta public more so than just being single-party propaganda and whether there would be more of an evenhanded, more of an educational piece to this type of advertising or messaging coming out of the Public Affairs Bureau. I don't know. Well, maybe as a member of the opposition of course I'd feel better about it. You know, in my former life there were comments on it that maybe this type of stuff should be more efficient, effective, and more with a related purpose. I'd just like to hear your comments on that.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Sure. I'd love to comment on it. The title of the document following the royalty review was true. I made a commitment, I believe the only person to make a commitment, that I recall, to review the royalty rates, and we did. We didn't massage anything. I delivered. Now, I don't know where some would like to put it in the document that we sent out to the people. You know, if we would have said something and not delivered, then that would have been an issue, but we did. It created probably – well, not probably. It was one of the most debated issues in the recent history of the province of Alberta: 70,000-some hits on the website, just on the website, plus the cards and letters that we received on both sides of the topic.

I will make a comment. There were some topics raised today with respect to third-party donations to either ads or some revenue, donations from corporations to the party. You know what? I'm not looking over my shoulder, like the comment was made here, because we tackled something that nobody was willing to do, and we delivered on it. The innuendo was there's a lot of money coming, supposedly, from the oil and gas industry, you know, so you're not

going to do anything to them. Well, we increased the royalty rates. We actually went through the whole process.

It was a commitment. I delivered and am proud of it. I don't know how else we can communicate it. Unfortunately, if it's really good news, I can tell you it's not going to be on the front page of the paper because one thing I learned in this House: it's always the reaction to the action that's the news story. It's not the action. I learned it the hard way. You know, as much good as you think you do, it's always the reaction to what you think is so good that is on the front page. In here it was a clear communication to Albertans in terms of our goal, how we got there, and what information was used to make the decision. If a significant topic comes up again in this province or in the next few months or few years, we will use the same strategy to communicate the information and the facts to Albertans.

4:40

**Mr. Hehr:** I do take the Premier's comments, and depending on what side of the issue you're on, you could have been proud of that. I found that some of the advertising tends to be more like my mother when I was in grade 3 and I came second in the spelling bee or something like that. That's my only comment there. At least from my perspective, I don't know if it should be that, but I guess that's just me talking here.

Those were really my only couple of questions, and we can move on from there.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Obviously coming second in a spelling bee was very good for the hon. gentleman because he's here in the Assembly, and there are not too many Albertans that got here. So I commend you for first, second, and things like that.

You know, it's always an issue for some, yet we hear from Albertans that we need more information. To get it through some of the regular media streams is very difficult unless you buy the advertising. A brochure on a quarterly basis is a heck of a lot cheaper than buying ads in papers.

By the way, when we get to further discussion in this House in terms of election expenses and leadership expenses and what should be spent on a campaign, living through the experience along with many others that were in a leadership, isn't it amazing how, you know, if you want to buy advertising space, you've got to put the money up front? Oh, and by the way, you do pay a bit more because guess what? You have to advertise. You found out the same thing in this campaign. You want to buy advertising? You know, it's term certain, and here is the price you pay. If you don't pay, you don't advertise.

I hope the message gets out there that there is more to this than just the political party, you know, investing in advertising during an election, not in communicating but in an election. Some are talking about putting limits on various expenditures, but I can't predict what the costs of advertising will be two years from now or five years from now. But at least the purpose of this Assembly is to debate it, to talk about it, and we'll put it together. We know what the third-party advertising cost. Well, I think we know. Somebody said that it was around \$2.2 million. I guess we'll never know because it doesn't have to be made public, but that's the issue: how much of this should be public, and who is behind it? I'll just leave it at that.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Executive Council business plan for 2008-11 references a policy co-ordination office and the work that it does with regard to government policy and planning. Specifically on page 134, core business 1 lists eight strategies outlined for the coming year for this office. My initial

question – actually, there will be three questions – centres around the relationship of this office to the policy units that are in all government ministries. My first question: how does this office avoid duplicating the efforts of specific ministries?

**Mr. Stelmach:** The policy co-ordination office supports the identification and implementation of the government's priorities. You know, we have five priorities for government. What happens is that ministries are responsible to deliver on those five priorities. Once again, something innovative, new to Alberta at least, is the mandate letters to ministers. This is what we expect ministers to accomplish at the end of the year.

The whole co-ordination of the overall tasks assigned to the ministers is still overseen by the policy co-ordination office, and again many times it's interministry or intraministry tasks. For instance, safe communities. It's not only the Solicitor General but, of course, the Justice minister. Then we have a housing component, a health component, a children services component. We need the co-ordination to make sure that the policy is moving in the right direction collectively in government. It's a major undertaking, and it requires a lot of work because over the last year, 12 to 14 months, we've undertaken a lot of change. We're going to be just as aggressive in this coming term. It plays a very, very important role.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you. My second question: what is the relationship between the corporate body and the ministries themselves?

**Mr. Stelmach:** In terms of the ministry itself, many times ministers would – for instance, if there's a priority in mind or if we have a priority as a government, then how do we achieve that priority? The minister then would do some research on their own. Some the PAB does, and as we heard from the questions raised, the minister would reach out to Albertans through various research tools, whether it be polling, focus groups, other types of research, to see if we're going in the right direction.

With respect to the policy co-ordination office we collate all of this information and ensure that we are going to reach our goals in terms of our five major priorities. I don't think it's duplication, but it is one way of ensuring, not necessarily managing but ensuring, that at a certain time period when we collate all the information and when it comes to government, we can check off the progress made in various areas and make sure that it's on track, on time, especially when it comes to planning for specific legislation that we need in this House for a very specific policy direction. Again, that also has to be co-ordinated, so it's a lot of work to do. Of course, we found that out through the royalty review after the consultation, and then the policy was put in place. Now we have to follow up with all of the various strategic legislative changes in – I forget – 26 different acts in the House. So it's a lot of work, but the more you want to accomplish, the more work is on the shoulders of our people to make sure that it's co-ordinated.

**Mr. Johnston:** Okay. My final, and then I'll just finish with a comment. I would like to know how the work of this office relates to the mandate letters that you issued to each and every cabinet minister.

**Mr. Stelmach:** The mandate letters are really a contract. It's a contract between the Premier and the minister, but it's also a contract between the minister, the government, and the people of Alberta. Last year, although we received some criticism when we

did our check marks, you know, when we say we're giving everybody an A or a B, what I heard from Albertans is that it's the first time in a long time where at the beginning of the year you made public what you want to accomplish and at the end of the term, you said: "Okay. This is where we're at, and either we can check the box off and say that this is done, or it's not done." In the first 12, 14 months we check-marked a lot of the boxes, from the climate change plan to the teacher pension liability and, of course, the royalty. It was difficult to do it within that first year.

Now, we've got the policy in place on the royalty framework. Now the next step this fall is to ensure that we pass all the legislation that allows the new policy to take place. It is a way to not only measure progress but report to the public and also keep the feet of various ministries to the fire so that at the end of the year we know where we're at and what we've accomplished. I dare say that I think that was a big help on March 3 because people then could see progress. They had something to measure.

4:50

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you. Just a comment, as I indicated. On page 135 under Performance Measures there's 2(a), 2(b), and 2(c), and for 2(b) and 2(c) the last actual was 88 per cent. That's commendable. I think the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East mentioned this: 64 per cent public satisfaction with government communications. Just a comment. I know we're striving to do better, and I think we can there. That's obviously 64 per cent approval, so 36 per cent the other way.

**Mr. Stelmach:** The hon. member makes a very good point. We've established, I believe, an aggressive goal: 75 per cent in approval rating of government policy is a very good goal to reach. We're going to do that. But, again, sometimes the only way of reaching that goal is through better focused communication. There's so much coming at Albertans every day through so many different mediums. That's one thing we're going to be talking about. Is it just report to Albertans in a print form, or is it something we can do through other media, through the Internet? You know, I learnt during the campaign things like Flickr, Twitter, Facebook. There was a fourth one I forgot. [interjection] The what? I don't know. Twitter or Flickr.

Anyway, that's how we communicate with especially younger Albertans. Once you get the information, then the other thing: it's got to be, you know, fast. You can't give a whole dissertation, like a large editorial today in the paper. Many people just want the base information: give me the facts. That's what they respond to. We've got a huge task ahead of ourselves, but we've got the people to do it. I think the more we reach out to Albertans, communicate, the better the success of the government and the success of policy implementation.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll continue where I left off before with the hon. Premier, and that is with the transaction from Executive Council, I believe, to the President of the Treasury Board of the CIA, the corporate internal audit services. That is one of many recent transfers, and if we look at other years, 2006 and again in 2007, there was very little money. In fact, there was none spent in 2006 on internal audits from the annual report, and in 2007 there was an amount of \$11,000. How much money will be spent this year in internal audits by the department?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I'm glad the member had the opportunity to ask another question because I wasn't able to respond to his last one. I referred to opposition tearing up agreements, and he said: well, it wasn't the opposition. I didn't name the opposition, but it was opposition that had made that statement, so I guess I tugged on a heartstring there.

Anyway, the internal audit: \$4.9 million transferred to Treasury Board. Executive Council base spending was adjusted. Internal audit groups in other provinces are located in Executive Council or in Finance/Treasury Board. The role is to help ministers put the right systems and controls in place to prevent problems, and the internal audits are a very important part of government operations to make sure their systems are in place for the protection of the public and protection of privacy and also to make sure that the money that has been allocated for very specific programs ends up in those programs and nowhere else.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Further to that, given the fact that Mr. Norris and Mr. Angus certainly didn't report over a period of time, three years, their credit card expenses in a satisfactory way, internal auditing can be very important, and it looks to me that whenever you look at the Auditor General's report, there was a failure in certain government departments.

However, last year PricewaterhouseCoopers had over \$32,000 in invoices to Executive Council, KPMG had over \$84,000, and Grant Thornton \$40,000, but that could be for anything. What in this year's budget will be allocated for external audits to be done for Executive Council by outside accounting agencies?

**Mr. Stelmach:** The member keeps bringing up the name of a former member and a former executive assistant. I can inform this House that after I was elected Premier, we changed the policy not because of any audit. It's simply this. All ministerial expenses are now posted. All executive expenses are posted. On a quarterly basis we'll do all transactions. Any cheques going out to anyone will be on the Internet. All manifests of air flights, you know, a minister flying somewhere, are made public. The manifests are made public and everybody knows who's on the plane and when they're leaving. So that is open and transparent. It's a major change in policy. We'll continue to ensure that our systems are operating well and to communicate whatever expenditures there are within government to the public.

There are other areas we're looking at in getting the information to Albertans sooner. The blue book used to come out I think once a year. I think anything \$5,000 or more was in the blue book. Any transaction less than \$5,000 wasn't in the blue book. But that was published once a year. Now we're not publishing but putting it on the Internet on a quarterly basis, so it gives very current information to Alberta taxpayers as to where their money is going. I don't know of any jurisdiction that is doing what we're doing in the province of Alberta in communicating to Albertans where their tax dollars are going, but it seems to be working very well in terms of ministerial travel expenses, flight manifests, and also office expenditures.

With respect to audits there are third-party audits, and they're done in various areas, but in those departments that use a considerable amount of information technology – our systems, of course, have very sensitive information. There are audits being done there to make sure that there is protection of that information. It's ongoing. You don't just do it one year and not the other. It's going to make sure that our systems are in place and working. So we'll continue to do that. There is a cost affixed to it, obviously. But, again, it's a third party applying the check on the operation of

government and the operation of ministries and also on all of our government offices in Alberta that deliver service.

I believe that now more than ever is the appropriate time to thank the Alberta public service. I'm so proud when I get an opportunity to travel to other provinces and really boast about the public service in this province. We've taken the leadership role as the province of Alberta in many policy areas. Many times other jurisdictions rely on Alberta to first of all design the policy, implement it, and learn from the Alberta public service. Really, the success of this government is as a result of the very hard work of our public service.

As with anything we have some challenges. We have to encourage people to join the Alberta public service. It is a good career. It is rewarding. Just like other employers, you know, other businesses, we have to keep working to attract new people to the government of Alberta. But I am just feeling that very few jurisdictions have the strength and the depth of the public service that we have here in Alberta. So an opportunity to say thank you to them all on behalf of all our members.

5:00

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much. My first question would be a point of clarification. If the Premier could do this, I would be very grateful. Now, any amount that is posted on the Internet, is that an amount that exceeds in total \$300? If one of the members of the party accompanying a minister picks up the tab on their credit card, is that amount also posted on the Internet?

While we're speaking about Internet postings, I would like to say publicly that I appreciate the government taking another one of our fine ideas from this side of the House and implementing it, and that was putting the public accounts online. First off, the government improved how the blue books were produced and made publicly available. Then you took one of our suggestions, which was to put them online. That is a step in the right direction towards being open and transparent, and I appreciate it. We've got lots of fine ideas over here, and if you want to take some more and utilize them, you're quite welcome to them.

With the public accounts I think that whenever you have grants and supplies and services listed alphabetically, it would be better for the taxpayers if they could see it in each department. For instance, we could have each department list what was granted from each department, what was also issued in supplies and services, capital assets, and others by department. Then we could check those amounts to see how close to being balanced they are when the annual report for each department is issued.

Now, speaking of annual reports, last year in the annual report for the Ministry of Executive Council under Schedule to the Financial Statements there was the salaries and benefits disclosure. The deputy minister had a total salary of a wee bit over 400 grand. There were a couple of different individuals in the chief of staff office. I would assume that there's only one individual there now because of the transition from the former Premier to your administration. That would also apply for the director of communications; I would think that there were two and that now there is only one full-time director of communications.

If we look at the estimates on page 196, we see the increase – it's almost a million dollars here – in the funding for the office of the Premier. How much of this additional funding will go towards salaries for individuals? Will any of this increased funding be provided for any of the senior officials who are listed in the schedule to the financial statements from last year? Have there been any new positions created in the Premier's office, or have there been some that have been eliminated through consolidation and streamlining of

the administration? If the Premier could answer those questions, I would be grateful.

**Mr. Stelmach:** I'd love to answer your questions. First of all, for the public record, I do not accept and will not accept any ideas from the Liberals. I haven't heard one that is of good quality. In fact, if we were to implement the kind of policies that they were trying to promote in this province during this last campaign, we wouldn't have an economy. We wouldn't have any kind of quality of life. I'm sorry, but to say publicly that shutting down the oil sands is only going to cost a billion dollars to the economy, "Oh, by the way, it's only a billion dollars; it's not a lot because the economy is \$242 billion" – well, \$242 billion is the gross domestic product of this province. The billion dollars comes out of your pocket and your pocket and your pocket. That's the kind of misinformation that was being spread.

Now they're arguing about the Public Affairs Bureau, saying: well, why are you spending more money? Well, because we've got to get the facts out. If Albertans listened to that kind of malarkey, we would not have any kind of economy in the province of Alberta, and I can guarantee that. The hon. member is also a boilermaker, and I'm sorry that he might have got his vessels under pressure.

Anyway, the amounts reported include salaries, bonuses, vacation payouts, and benefits. The salary schedule is published, so at the end of the year whatever the estimates are – the money expended in Executive Council for salaries and all other expenditures has to balance with what was passed in this Legislature in terms of the estimates.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. That was an interesting answer from the hon. Premier. However, I would like to remind him that he was talking about the sustainability fund a little earlier in his remarks, and that was certainly another fine idea from this side of the House. The idea of eliminating the Alberta health care premiums was an idea not only from this side of the House but from the third party as well. I could go on and on and on with ideas that have been adopted by the government.

In light of that and in light of being open and transparent and in the spirit of full disclosure, will the Premier allow us to see the Executive Council fleet list of which cabinet minister is driving what kind of car now?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Unless the ministers drive sometimes in the middle of the night, the cars are parked here around the building; they're parked in the parkade. Yeah, if you want a list – it's also public – of what we've purchased in terms of cars.

This leads me to another topic, the cap on new cars. I think it's \$43,500. The other day there was a question raised: why aren't we buying, you know, cars that are hybrids and other issues in terms of vehicles that are better equipped, less greenhouse gas emissions? That's obviously something we're going to work through. But at \$43,500 it's pretty difficult to find cars that are, you know, hybrids, unless you're buying cars that are manufactured outside the country, in some other countries. I don't know.

Anyway, with respect to cars it's a full list, and it's public. I don't know what more we can do in that area.

**Mr. MacDonald:** So the latest list from the executive fleet will be placed in the Legislature Library forthwith? Yes or no?

**Mr. Stelmach:** The purchases are all public, so I don't know – yes or no, the latest list. What? Latest to the minute?

You know, we have a \$37 billion budget. We've got serious issues that we have to tackle in the province of Alberta, and the member, you know, is paid quite well for sitting here in the Assembly just like anybody else. If that's the topic, we'll provide you the list. I don't know if we can legally give you the licence plate numbers, but you can follow them around Edmonton and, you know, amuse yourself, I guess. I don't know.

**Mr. MacDonald:** I'm not after the licence plates but, certainly, the model and the year. That would be appreciated.

**Mr. Vandermeer:** Are you still driving that Capri there, Hugh?

5:10

**Mr. MacDonald:** No, I'm not driving my Capri. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, Mr. Chairman, forced me to buy a four-cylinder, fuel-efficient Vibe, and I believe it came from the hon. Member for Strathcona's dealership.

Now, the financial questions around the Public Affairs Bureau. We've asked a few questions, but there are still many left. Again, going back to page 196 of the estimates for the department – and I'm just going to use another department as an example or a comparison. I will choose Seniors and Community Supports. The ministry support services: the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, communications. There is more of a breakdown in other government departments of where the money is being spent than there is in Executive Council. For instance, there's not a line item here on page 196 that would indicate what is in the deputy minister's office. It's just a \$9.5 million amount for the office of the Premier/Executive Council. Can you please, hon. Premier, explain to us in the Assembly and the taxpayers in this province why there seems to be more apparent detail in other departments than there is in Executive Council?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Well, there are more line items in other departments because they do have more line expenditures. That's why.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Well, that's interesting, Mr. Chairman. You have a deputy minister. I assume they have their own office. I think it would be respectful to the taxpayers if that was provided in the future.

Now, the funding for corporate services has increased substantially once again. The Premier was quite anxious to tell us about the \$37 billion budget. Can you please tell us now how this additional funding is to be spent?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Rest assured that this government is very cognizant and pays attention to the dollars that we spend on behalf of the Alberta taxpayer. In terms of the reporting process to Albertans, again, one of the best in Canada, the most transparent. We'll continue to do that.

In terms of the breakdown of the voted expense by element, the office of the Premier/Executive Council, \$9.5 million: that's the offices in Edmonton and Calgary, correspondence, communications, deputy minister's office, cabinet co-ordination . . . [Mr. Stelmach's speaking time expired] That's it?

**The Deputy Chair:** Time having expired, I'll now call on the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With your permission, I'd just like to go back and forth using the 20 minutes provided. Thank you.

Mr. Premier, some questions with regard to the branding for Albertans. There has been lots of discussion out in Whitecourt-Ste.

Anne since the publication of branding for Albertans and what we're going to do spending that money. You know, it's definitely meant to make sure that everybody knows that Alberta is a great place to live and work and play and raise our families and do business and where the word "profit" is a good word. I know the government of Alberta is taking the lead in the development of this brand, but lots of folks within Whitecourt-Ste. Anne have approached me this last little while saying: well, how do we participate?

I think most everyone would know that Whitecourt is the snowmobile capital of Alberta. In the promotion for tourism we have opportunities to promote abroad and within the scope of this branding for Alberta. So how does a community like Whitecourt, being the snowmobile capital of Alberta, of course, which everybody knows, participate in this branding for Alberta?

**Mr. Stelmach:** What we're going to be doing, hon. member, is putting together through the RFP what is the best way of communicating a number of strategic areas not only to Canadians but to people around the world, and certainly part of that is tourism. We have so much to offer in the province of Alberta when it comes to tourism. No matter where you go, from the beautiful snowmobile capital of Whitecourt to Grande Cache to Grande Prairie, there are so many different sights and scenes and parks through the area. This is one area where we have to improve how we advertise the province because we have so much to offer. Yet, as I said earlier, for whatever reason we seem to be lacking in getting the message out on tourism to other Canadians and people around the world.

Now, I found out that many Britons, for example, make their travel destination decisions based on the scenery they see in movies. Of course, we've had the privilege of a number of companies doing movies in Alberta, tremendous scenery behind. Of course, they come to Alberta as a result of wanting to see the scenery. Now, to get it down to a community basis, I would suspect we'll do more through tourism Alberta.

However, here's the point I want to make. If we're exporting, for instance, an agricultural product to Japan, if the little prairie rose, the Alberta prairie rose is on the box, on the container, it immediately sends a message to the Japanese consumer that this product is from Alberta, that it's safe, that it's good quality. Again, it's branded, the fact that it came from the province of Alberta. We have to do more of that, and how we can incorporate that strategically into tourism is going to be a challenge. I honestly think that with the clear water springs, the parks, the tremendous museums, the art galleries we have in the province of Alberta, we should be able to compete with other jurisdictions.

The hon. member talked about the snowmobile capital of Alberta. How do you attract possible tourists here during winter? Again, recreational opportunities are going to play an important role. It's not only the proper trails, groomed trails for snowmobiling, but snowshoeing, skiing obviously attract a lot of people. Again, to attract people, you've got to get them here in a reasonable time, meaning if people are flying to Alberta, it would be access to all of the various communities without spending a lot of time either on a highway or in a plane.

With respect to investment in terms of branding Alberta, there are a couple of other areas that we have to focus on. One over and above tourism is agriculture. We will be seeing new products in Alberta. The reason I'm mentioning agriculture and why we have to start branding Alberta even more aggressively than we did before is the issue we have now with the policy position of the Americans on country of origin labelling. That really worries Albertans as it does worry all Canadians. Country of origin labelling has been introduced in the United States under the veil of food safety. Simply saying that this product came from Canada or from Mexico and

arrived on an American shelf does not improve food safety. You get to better food safety not by labelling the product but by looking at temperature control and packaging.

To give you an example of how we need to improve the branding of Alberta. If this is a can of Campbell's soup, it of course may contain product from Alberta, Ontario, the United States, or Mexico. Remember, it's a can of soup on a shelf in a food market someplace in the States. If, let's say, the vegetables were sourced from Lethbridge and Medicine Hat and the beef could have come from Brooks and some of the vegetables may be from the United States, then the can on that particular shelf in a grocery store in the United States would say, you know, vegetable soup with beef or something: may contain product from Canada and from Mexico. So you have one can. Then the next can may say: product only from Canada. So that's the second can. Guess what? The supermarket or the food market is going to say, "Well, we're not going to give you shelf space for three different cans of tomato soup or vegetable soup; we're only going to give space for one," which will be the container that's American product only, U.S. product. So what does that mean? Well, it kicks the other two cans of soup off the shelf. It is to a great degree more a protectionist policy as opposed to food safety. So why the branding? Again, we've got to find ways of building a better image of agricultural products, of food products, of value-added products so that we can gain the shelf space in the United States.

5:20

The other area, of course, is with respect to our oil and gas. Lately we had and have had a number of environmental groups, most of them based in the United States, talking about Alberta oil, especially oil sands. We're going to have to spend a considerable amount of time in this area talking about what we have already done in emission control, what the future plans are, how we fit into the overall Canadian plan of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and how we communicate that to Washington and to investors around the world.

The last few months, obviously, proved to us that we have a lot of work to do, especially in the United States. I think section 526 says that the armed forces won't buy the oil, the postal service won't buy this dirty oil from the United States. When we were in Washington we challenged them: you tell us how bringing oil from Kazakhstan all the way to the United States by ship actually has less greenhouse gas emissions than developing it in the oil sands and shipping it to the United States by pipeline. You know, those two equations don't balance.

Again, having the Washington office gives the opportunity to communicate the information, part of the questions raised today. The Smithsonian also gave us a good example, where we showed a

lot of the equipment from the oil sands and also showed the technology that's currently in practice. But I firmly believe part of the branding is to communicate not only to the Americans but to other people around the world that with the technology we have in place, with the carbon capture, we will actually have less greenhouse gas emissions per barrel of oil from the oil sands than conventional oil from any other country. It doesn't matter where they develop it; we'll be able to beat them in the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions. On the other hand, while we're talking about greenhouse gas emissions, we also have to fit in how we can measure the overall greenhouse gas emissions in equivalency compared to other jurisdictions.

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Premier, but the time allotted for consideration of this department's estimates has expired. I'd like to now invite the officials to leave the Assembly.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the Department of Executive Council relating to the 2008-2009 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

**The Acting Speaker:** On the report by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, does the Assembly concur in the report?

**Hon. Members:** Concur.

**The Acting Speaker:** Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly now adjourn until 7:30 this evening, at which time we'll reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:26 p.m.]







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