

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Tuesday, May 1, 2007

**1:00 p.m.**

Date: 07/05/01

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

**The Acting Speaker:** Let us pray. O source of all wisdom, care, and understanding, bless this province of ours and its people to be the guardians of the trust given unto them. Bring forth from this Assembly guidance to benefit all those who live within its borders and outside. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly a group of 30 visitors from Holy Family school in Grimshaw. They're spending a good part of their week here in the city and, certainly, had to travel over six hours one way to get here. I don't often have school groups here, and I'm very, very proud that we've got representation from Grimshaw. They are accompanied today by teachers Miss Jennifer Anderson and Miss Kim Conquergood, by parent helpers Ms Roxanne Stinn, Mrs. Heather Hockley, Mr. Clayton Cardinal, Mr. Henry Jonk, and Mr. Chester Dodgson. They are seated in the public gallery. I would invite them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you Lorna Willert, who is one of my constituency assistants in Innisfail. Lorna has worked for me for almost seven years. She is greatly involved in the community as well as a dedicated and loyal individual who has been extremely supportive and a definite asset to my team. Lorna is joining us today in the members' gallery, and I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Marz:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Royal Canadian Legion's Alberta-Northwest Territories Command takes a keen interest in promoting the values of good citizenship among young people throughout the province. The Legion is in partnership with the Legislative Assembly office in a program that reflects that good work. It's Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program. We are very appreciative of both their financial support and their involvement for this annual event, which began last evening and will conclude later this afternoon. In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are Mr. Don Orr, the Legion's command first vice-president, who is accompanied by his wife, Beryl Orr, and Darrel Jones, the Legion's vice-president, and his companion, Darlene Burnett. Mr. Orr and his Legion team have been instrumental in ensuring that the participants have been so well looked after. We will now invite our guests to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

My next introduction, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and to all members 59 students who are here today as partici-

pants in your MLA for a Day program. The participants have spent time with the Royal Canadian Legion, debated a resolution, spent the night at a local hotel, visited in their member's office, had lunch with them, and following question period they will receive a tour and briefing on the constituent elements of this House. The ultimate aim of the day's activities is to further develop the interest and understanding of our parliamentary system among our student guests. The students come from varying backgrounds, but one I would like to note is the granddaughter of a former executive director in the office of the former Premier Peter Lougheed. Our shadow colleagues are seated in both galleries. They are accompanied by their Legion chaperones Joan O'Reilly, Audrey Sluggett, Gordon McDonald, Wayne Donner, and Barb and Reid Morris. I would ask them as well to rise now and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 12 individuals who are concerned about the availability of support and service for children with autism and the many roadblocks to access assistance. First of all, I'd like them to rise when I finish: Gail Wilkinson from Edmonton, Yvette Ludwig from Edmonton, Mary Jo Hague from Edmonton, Christine Barringham and Eric Barringham from Edmonton, Dabby Fong from Calgary, Guy Emond from Calgary, Sherry Miller from Calgary, Kierstin Hatt from Camrose, Brian Hockin from Wetaskiwin, Amy Anderson from Edmonton, and Assad Chaudhry from Edmonton. I'd like them to rise and please accept the warm and traditional welcome from the Assembly.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to introduce to you and to the Assembly six courageous Alberta landowners who are here to express their profound disappointment in the failure of our regulators to properly monitor and protect groundwater in the province. They are: from Rosebud, Fiona Lauridsen, Debbie Signer, and Jessica Ernst; from Ponoka, Shawn and Ronalgie Campbell; and in absentia Dale Zimmerman, who was here a year ago with complaints of gross contamination of his groundwater. Could they please stand, and we'll give them the usual welcome of the Legislature.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to have two introductions. The first person I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly is Brianne Hudson. Now, Brianne is a very good example of citizen advocacy. She and her fellow residents of the Sierra building have done a great deal of media to publicize their situation around lack of rent control, and later I'll be tabling a petition from them. I understand that Brianne is in the members' gallery. I would ask her to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is a very active group of seniors. I'm not sure if they're in the Assembly yet, but I'll put this on the record for when they do arrive. This is the Minerva Senior Studies group out of Grant MacEwan Community College in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre. We're expecting about 14 visitors. This is a really lively group. They're getting together to

study, for the most part, but I always enjoy my visits with them, and I'm looking forward to our usual tea and cake during Seniors' Week. If that group is in the galleries, would they please rise and accept our welcome.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 33 bright, inquisitive young minds from Sweet Grass school, in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. They are visiting the Legislature today to observe their MLA in action and learn a little bit about our democratic process. They're accompanied by teachers Mrs. Fiona Mark and Mr. Dean Hess. I would ask that they please now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a former page of this Assembly, Stacy Schell, who is visiting us. Having observed MLA behaviour while she was here, she's appropriately studying psychology and political science at the University of Western Ontario, and she's back to visit with us for the summer. I invite her to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Melanie Kay, Teresa Alenuik, and Richard Konkin. They're all workers on strike, entering the 235th day, at the Palace Casino here in Edmonton. We're very concerned about the state of Alberta labour laws and its impact on the Palace Casino employees. Melanie Kay has been at the Palace Casino for six and a half years and works as a slot cashier. Teresa Alenuik and Richard Konkin are both dealers at the Palace Casino and have been working there for the past seven years. Richard is also a member of the union's bargaining committee. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**1:10**

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased and honoured to introduce four visitors today that are in the members' gallery, and I would like them to stand as I introduce them. First I'd like to introduce Laure Mwan, the Edmonton-Manning STEP student for this summer. She's originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and came to Canada in 2000, didn't know a word of English. She speaks excellent English now. She's working in my constituency office for the summer as she's a student at NAIT in office and records. I look forward to working with her.

I'd also like to introduce the STEP student for my Legislature office, Kirstyn Rau. She's originally from Daysland. Her father served on town council there for several years, implanting an interest in politics. She's in political science at Grant MacEwan and looks to go into law.

I'd also like to introduce Robin Williams, who's a legislative research assistant at my Legislature office. She's finished her first year of business at NAIT and will be returning in the fall. I look forward to working with her.

And last but not least is Catherine Obacz, their chief, my legislative liaison and chief of staff for the office of the independent member.

These women are all very independent, Mr. Speaker, and I ask this Legislature to welcome them all in its traditional warm welcome. Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Little Bow.

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you two guests in the members' gallery. The first is my constituency manager from Little Bow, Lois McLeod, who might just be the longest serving constituency manager in the province now, since 1993. [interjections] I've been corrected already. Almost. The second is our new leg. assistant, that is going to be helping the MLA for Battle River-Wainwright and myself, Mr. Deva Veylan. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

### Members' Statements

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

#### Climb and Run for Wilderness

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two Saturdays ago, on April 21, the Alberta Wilderness Association hosted their 16th annual climb and run for wilderness in Calgary. Over 800 intrepid runners and climbers conquered all 802 steps of the Calgary Tower. Over \$150,000 was raised in Calgary's premier Earth Day event. That's over \$150,000 in support of conservation and education programs that help protect our natural heritage.

Congratulations to individual and team members in each of the numerous categories. There were all sorts of prizes awarded, but that's not what it was about. I do want to make special mention of one truly inspirational participant. Her name, Mr. Speaker, is Phyllis Hart. She was back for her 11th tower climb, 11th year in a row. Phyllis Hart continues to inspire us all. She is 92 years young.

It was a truly festival-like atmosphere, with musicians and face painters and wildlife mascots cheering the athletes on. In addition, 25 individuals and groups showcased their work at the Wild Alberta Expo.

Speaking of wildlife, I'd like to thank the members of our team, the Lougheed Lightning, including Joe Lougheed, Duane Monea, and Kurtis Averill, who certainly kept the fun in fundraising. If you combine our efforts with those of three- and five-year-old Samantha and Kiana Averill, who climbed the tower a total of three times, and add another courtesy of our MLA for Calgary-Hays, we climbed the tower a total of 52 times.

Mr. Speaker, I trust the members of this Assembly will join me in recognizing Christyann Olson and everyone at the Alberta Wilderness Association as they work on their own and with government to ensure that we continue to strive to find the correct balance between environment and economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

#### Alberta Film and Television Awards

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I had the pleasure of attending the 33rd annual Alberta film and television awards with numerous other colleagues as presented by the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association, AMPIA. Film and television production in Alberta continues to skyrocket, and this annual awards

night allows us an opportunity to congratulate and to thank all of the producers, directors, writers, actors, musicians, and numerous others who work behind the scenes and are at the heart of this incredible industry.

Local productions are generating more and more attention for Alberta as well as more and more opportunities for our talented and creative artists. Given the success of the Oscar-winning blockbuster *Brokeback Mountain* and the upcoming release of Brad Pitt's *The Assassination of Jesse James* as well as the full-length feature film *Christmas in Wonderland*, that is being filmed at West Edmonton Mall as we speak, the landscapes and the spirit of Alberta are attracting major international attention as are the many economic advantages of filming right here in Alberta. We also have some of the most skilled and creative crews, producers, and performers anywhere in the world.

In support of this amazing industry, the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture attended the awards show and announced that funding for the Alberta film development program is being increased to \$18.3 million. This will help generate hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of production right here in our province. As I have said on numerous occasions, film and television production will soon become a billion dollar industry in Alberta.

Congratulations to all the nominees and award winners, including my constituent Louis Sedmak, who captured the best original musical score award, along with Van Wilmott, and also to former Premier Ralph Klein, who received the Friend of the Industry award.

Thank you, AMPIA, to your staff and volunteer board members, for another truly outstanding awards show and for continuing to promote Alberta as the place in which to film.

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

#### Autism Spectrum Disorder

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the biggest misconceptions we have about those with autistic spectrum disorders is that they are insensitive and inhabit a world of their own. It's my understanding that, on the contrary, some are more aware of our world than we are. Many find living in our world acutely uncomfortable, even excruciating. The repetitive patterns that strike us as puzzling, irritating, and bizarre are coping mechanisms, often the only way these highly sensitive people can block the stimuli that assault their senses. Chanting, reciting, and outright withdrawal can be attempts to take control of their world to limit distractions that surround them.

Imagine someone pounding repeatedly on a hollow container near your head, shouting meaningless monosyllables at you, making a sound like fingernails scraping on a chalkboard, or flashing a strobe light on and off in the corner of your field of vision. These examples may give you a sense of the world, our world, that the autistic inhabit and their need to retreat from it.

Fifty years ago air pollution was not an issue. Fifteen years ago few believed second-hand cigarette smoke could be harmful or food preservatives were a problem for any but a few. How things have changed. These allergies were not peculiarities but an iceberg tip of a challenge we all need to take seriously. Mr. Speaker, I believe that by mid-century a host of other influences will be treated as seriously as hazardous chemicals.

For now I believe that many of the autistic children are canaries in the mine. Let us, therefore, not see them as those to be fixed or normalized or tolerated. Let us provide the supports to meet them as much as possible in their world and a willingness to shape our own world in a way that will be safer and more hospitable for all.

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

#### Wheelchair Curling Champions

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March of this year I stood in this House and introduced the 2007 Alberta wheelchair champions. Well, it gets better. In April, from the 5th to the 9th, they attended the national championship in Ottawa, Ontario, and I attended the opening ceremonies on behalf of our Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Speaker, although this team was at the wrong end of a 4-2 game against British Columbia, they went right to the finals. So they came up a little bit short this year. But the team of Anne Hibberd, Bridget Wilson, Jack Smart, spare Bob Johns, skip Bruno Yizek, and coach Ernie Comerford did a tremendous job this year in the first-ever nationals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

1:20

#### May Day

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to stand today and invite all members to join me in celebrating May Day 2007. In 1884 May 1 was chosen by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labour Unions to recognize the hard-won and well-deserved gains made by working people through the trade union movement. In fact, the entire development of progressive social programs, including the Canada pension plan, public health care, and the 40-hour workweek, has resulted from the struggle of Canada's labour movement.

Over a hundred years later the importance of unions for all working people has never been more clear. The labour movement has consistently been on the front lines in the fight to protect our public health care system, minimize environmental impact, and ensure that Alberta has a top-notch public education system.

As May Day falls so closely to the International Day of Mourning, we would be remiss if we didn't also acknowledge the very important role played by the labour movement in promoting workplace safety. The shameful shortage of health and safety inspectors in this province means that the implementation of important safety measures is left to the honour system, a system which too often allows profit to get in the way of safety. In the absence of a strong commitment on the part of the government to monitor and enforce safety regulations, trade unions play a key role in advocating for worker protection.

Alberta unions face particular challenges in their struggles for workplace fairness and dignity. Alberta has the worst labour laws in the country. As a bare minimum the government should commit to passing first contract arbitration legislation and introducing rules banning replacement workers. Such basic labour laws might have prevented, and probably would have, the acrimonious strikes at Tyson Foods, Shaw, and A-Channel. They might also help resolve the current strike at Palace Casino.

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

#### Camrose Fire Department Centennial

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago the Camrose Fire Department reached a significant milestone as it celebrated its 100th anniversary. On Saturday, April 21, Camrose celebrated the history of its fire department through a special 100th anniversary firemen's ball. This was a time to recognize the early

beginnings of firefighters, which largely relied on local volunteers and horse-drawn pumps.

This year's anniversary has particular meaning for the Camrose Fire Department as they will be moving into a new fire hall this June. This new fire hall is the third fire hall for the city of Camrose, replacing the existing facility, which was built in 1954. The grand opening of the new fire hall is slated to be held in conjunction with Camrose's Founders Days this August. Founders Days, a week to celebrate our heritage, will also highlight Camrose's first fire chief, Frank P. Layton, and will display firefighting memorabilia during the event.

The anniversary of the Camrose Fire Department is an opportune time to recognize the importance of firefighting in our province. Firefighting is a thankless and risk-filled profession. Firefighters understand that their role in the protection of persons and property can result in the ultimate sacrifice. We are very grateful for their dedication to their role in emergency response.

Many firefighters in this province are volunteers and join fire departments in service to their community. Volunteer fire departments rely on the dedication of their members to be prepared for emergencies. The Camrose Fire Department is no different. They are a dedicated and committed force and drive the success of the department. Their accomplishments over the past 100 years are a reflection of their important service to the community.

I want to congratulate fire chief Peter Krich and the Camrose Fire Department on their 100th anniversary. I want to thank them for their outstanding work and dedication, and I wish them the best as they move into a new fire hall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### head: **Presenting Petitions**

**Mr. Loughheed:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a petition asking the government to introduce legislation to suspend a graduated driver's licence if the holder of the licence is involved in a serious collision resulting in injury or death. This petition is signed by many residents of Sherwood Park and Strathcona constituencies and is the first of many which will follow.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from Unity House in northeast Edmonton saying, "We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to hold rent increases to no more than the rise in the average monthly wage until December 31, 2010."

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, did you have a petition?

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, yes, I do. I'd like to table a petition with 11 signatures. The petition notes that Alberta is 1 of 3 provinces that do not provide basic protection for newly organized workers and calls on the Assembly to enact first contract legislation.

#### head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege today to table the requisite number of copies of a calendar with respect to the

appearances before Committee of Supply. I believe that all three House leaders have agreed to it. If there are any errors, I am sure I will be back tomorrow to correct same. It's been a hard-negotiated process.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table copies of a call to action distributed today by Ben Seutter, president of the Edmonton Apartment Association. The memo notes that MLAs are hearing from tenants concerned about massive rental increases and that the Edmonton Apartment Association needs to "counter that influence." The call to action also asks for a guarantee from the labour union supporters of the Member of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that people who work in the rental industry will limit their wage hikes to once every 365 days.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today. The first is a letter from Roshika Khanna and was sent to every MLA's constituency office in Calgary. Mrs. Khanna is the program co-ordinator with the Calgary Scope Society, helping improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities. She explains that she's been unable to find a two-bedroom rental unit at around \$700 because of the lack of affordable units, the shortage of subsidized housing, and landlord attitudes towards disabled people on limited incomes for over two months.

The second is an e-mail from my constituent Trudy Hill, who works as a receptionist for the Alberta Research Council. As a unionized government of Alberta employee she is not able to pay the increasing cost of living, including a recent 45 per cent rent increase.

The third is an e-mail from another constituent, Robin Smith. When she moved to Calgary a year ago, she was only able to find an apartment that was at the top of her budget. She works full-time as a medical lab assistant in a Calgary hospital and some months ago had to take a 30 hour per week job as a customer service specialist. Now working 70 hours per week and with a sick father she can't go to visit. Her rent has been increased to \$924 plus power and parking for a 550 square . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. member, this is just tablings – okay? – not a speech.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Chase:** Excuse me. I have two more tablings.

**The Acting Speaker:** Make them brief, then, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. The fourth e-mail is from my constituent Ken Elmquist, who received an increase from \$765 to \$1,115 per month.

From another constituent, Candace Loken, whose rent is increased by \$400, and she's on CPP and disability, and it takes up her maximum of \$900.

The truth hurts.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of an e-mail I received from Don Gunderson regarding the Affordable Housing Task Force. He notes that despite the presentations made by people from across the province, most of the recommenda-

tions were rejected. He says that rejection of these recommendations brings into question that sincerity of other policy review panels.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** We will get back to tablings later.

head: **Oral Question Period**

**The Acting Speaker:** The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

### Calgary Municipal Funding

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The *Calgary Herald* today released a poll that 7 out of 10 Calgarians support Mayor Bronconnier's efforts to make sure that the Premier keeps to his promise about municipal funding. Clearly, many Calgarians believe that this government is out of touch with their concerns and issues. To the President of the Treasury Board: given the strong support for the mayor's position that no strings be attached to municipal funding, will the minister reconsider the strings attached to this government's budget allocation to the city of Calgary so that local concerns can be met locally?

1:30

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, obviously, I wasn't in the room with the Premier and the mayor. Obviously, the opposition leader wasn't. They have discussed at length what they feel is right for Alberta. Mayor Bronconnier may have his own agenda, and I would suggest that you should look very closely around you because I think the way he is posturing, it has a lot more to do with politics and a lot less to do with dealing with the citizens of Calgary.

**The Acting Speaker:** The first supplementary.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the President of the Treasury Board was in charge of the treasury.

Mr. Speaker, I'm quoting from a speech delivered minutes ago by the mayor of Calgary to the Economic Development Authority there: the promise made by the Premier was not kept in this budget; for example, of the \$127 million earmarked for Calgary this year only \$42 million will actually be available, unfettered, to address the infrastructure priorities of this city, meaning Calgary. To the same minister: what reply does this government have to the mayor and to the people of Calgary?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. That's new money. The city of Calgary already gets \$272 million for infrastructure. The city of Calgary is dealt with on a very fair and equitable basis as are the rest of the cities and towns in Alberta. Is the opposition leader suggesting that we should take money from them to support the mayor's habits in Calgary? This Premier also committed to do what's right for all Albertans, and that's fair and equitable distribution of money.

**The Acting Speaker:** The second supplementary.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, let's continue with this. This is quoting from the mayor of Calgary earlier today. What does the budget mean for Calgary? Quote: it means that some important long-range investments may need to be delayed or cancelled. Then he goes on to say, quote: I am very disappointed to announce that in light of the province's budget we will be suspending the work on two new LRT lines indefinitely. End quote. Given that we've just confirmed these announcements from the mayor, can I ask again the

same minister: why does this government refuse to respond positively to immediate and pressing transportation needs in Calgary?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Because we respond to the needs of an entire community and not the political aspirations of one. We spent \$2.2 billion on health care in Calgary, \$1.3 billion on education, \$704 million on postsecondary funding. We as this government are trying to address the issues around homelessness, the issues around affordable housing, the transportation bottlenecks, and we will do it. As Mr. Speaker has seen, the mayor of Edmonton seems quite comfortable in sitting down with the relevant ministers and addressing the issues, not creating them.

**The Acting Speaker:** Second Official Opposition question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

### Affordable Housing

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay. Let's talk homelessness. He doesn't understand Calgary; maybe he understands affordable housing, though I doubt it. The crisis continues in Alberta today. The mess is getting worse. Albertans are being forced out of their homes. No matter how many denials and excuses we hear from this government, the evidence points to this government's policy failures as the main culprit. To the President of the Treasury Board: when the Treasury Board approved the money for affordable housing, did it ever cross this minister's mind that until these units were built, Albertans were going to face huge rent increases and often be forced out of their homes?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The housing situation in Alberta did not happen overnight, and it will not be solved overnight with the twinkle of the magic wand. This government has taken the responsible action, which, indeed, is increasing the supply of units to meet demand. All of the other stuff in there is stopgaps, and it might make you feel good politically, but it doesn't work.

**The Acting Speaker:** First supplementary. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear. In question period yesterday this House was told, "This government has learned from history that rent controls do not work." Well, perhaps the government has not learned because the 1978 CMHC annual report released at the very time rents in this province were controlled noted that over 17,000 rental apartment units were started that year. Over 17,000. Granted, in 1978 governments also offered tax breaks to rental property developers and provided rent control for tenants. So to the same minister: will this government change its stand and do what works, or is his advice to renters to go to Campers Village to shop for their next home?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, this government looks forward to solutions, not backwards. In 1978 the government was entering into huge debt to try and satisfy some of the housing requirements. That ended up with accumulated debts of \$22 billion. We're not doing that again. It's short sighted, it's irresponsible, and it doesn't work in the long term.

**Mr. Taylor:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if anybody would know about short sighted, it would be this government.

We support the government's commitment to funding to create affordable housing, but solving the affordable housing crisis also

takes not only money but leadership and innovation, and it takes land. You've got to have land to build the housing on. Municipalities like Hinton and Fort McMurray need the province to release land to them right now if they're going to start constructing new housing. Will the President of the Treasury Board commit to releasing Crown land for affordable housing, and will he provide this land for affordable housing to municipalities for free or for a dollar, sir?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, the government works closely with Fort McMurray. We met with the mayor last Tuesday, and we talked about how important it is to get a plan together so that we're working towards a solution. The mayor of Edmonton came to the government with an opportunity to use some of the existing lands to build affordable housing, and this government was very supportive of initiatives like that that work with us and the departments and the related agencies to get a solution to it. So there are some good ideas in getting land, making land affordable where it's necessary, but the successes have come when the mayors of large cities work with the government.

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

#### Groundwater Stewardship

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Groundwater is our most precious resource, more precious even than the valuable hydrocarbons we extract from over 400,000 sites across the province. Rural landowners, unable now to drink their water, are here today demanding answers to the legitimate questions about dramatic pollution of their drinking water. They have composed a pledge for all Albertans, calling for responsible groundwater stewardship. To the Minister of Environment: why after one and a half years of investigating contaminated groundwater from Wetaskiwin to Ponoka to Rosebud do we still have no answers for these rural folks?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is exactly right. We should be and are committed to the management and stewardship of our groundwater. At the same time, I have to advise the member that there have been no conclusive opportunities for us to identify any direct links between the development of coal-bed methane and groundwater. So the research that's ongoing through monitoring of wells, through a number of initiatives that are under way is trying to arrive at the very answer to the question that this hon. member seeks.

**The Acting Speaker:** First supplementary.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government may need to hire some scientists to find this out.

These folks with valid health and safety concerns about massive amounts of gas in water and unknown chemicals burning their skin have been repeatedly promised by the former Premier and Environment minister rapid assessment and resolution of their problems. To the minister again: when will these good farm folks have their water restored?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta Environment is doing everything that it possibly can to get to the bottom of this issue. We've drilled a number of monitoring wells. We have a program of ongoing water testing. But I also need to advise this House that in some instances we have been unable to get the co-operation of the landowner to allow us to do ongoing monitoring and testing of the well in

question. It's very difficult to get to the bottom of the issue if you don't get to the bottom of the well, let me say.

**The Acting Speaker:** Second supplementary. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Rosenberg forum and its subsequent report recently criticized soundly the lack of investment and science in managing Alberta's groundwater. Yesterday the Pembina Institute reported again, calling for a systematic and reliable groundwater monitoring system. The public has lost the trust in this government and its regulators in managing and monitoring our groundwater. Final to the minister: with the growing concerns about oil and gas effects on groundwater, will he do the responsible thing and call for an independent review of groundwater impacts from oil and gas activity in this province?

*1:40*

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, a snapshot in time does not provide the amount of information that's needed. That's why it's so important that we have ongoing monitoring that gives us accumulated information over time. That doesn't happen overnight. I can't just speed up the clock and get two years' worth of information in six months. That's part of the problem.

The other part of the problem, Mr. Speaker – in fact, it's not a problem; it's the solution – is that much of what the hon. member is referring to was part of the multistakeholder committee that was formed one year ago that the Pembina Institute referred to yesterday, and frankly we're making very, very good progress in implementing those recommendations.

**The Acting Speaker:** The leader of the third party.

#### Affordable Housing

*(continued)*

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The rent crisis has MLAs' phones ringing off the hook. So much so that the Edmonton Apartment Association has decided to help the government set the record straight. In a memorandum, which I just tabled, from the president of the Edmonton Apartment Association it says, "In a meeting with MLA, Thomas Lukaszuk, he did say that he received about 10 calls [or] letters per day from people complaining about rising rents," and he guesses that "other MLAs are receiving similar calls." He goes on to say, "It is not the private rental industry's Constitutional responsibility to provide affordable housing for Albertans." My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Given the statement, whose responsibility is it?

**The Acting Speaker:** This chair is going to enforce the 45-second rule.

Any response, President of the Treasury Board?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The responsibility to look after certain people in our society that need our help is ours, and we take that responsibility very seriously. Whether it be seniors or whether it be the infirm or mentally ill, we look after them. It's not our responsibility to house everyone who comes to Alberta looking for a better life, but there are a lot coming, as you all know. So the people that the Alberta government has responsibility for, we address. There is a temporary imbalance between the affordability and availability of suites and what the marketplace can offer, and that, unfortunately, will take some time to balance out.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, tell that to the people who are ending up on the street.

This memo goes on to say that “when people spend more than 30% of their gross monthly income on housing, then it is deemed unaffordable.” It goes on to say that in Europe and Asia and so on this is more like 50 per cent. “Consequently, our society is having these big discussions on arbitrary numbers.” It’s clear the apartment association thinks that people should pay up to 50 per cent of their income for rent. Will the government take steps to make sure that that does not become the case?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has gathered from his press release is certainly his opinion, and he can twist it around however he wants. The fact is that there are many thousands of very responsible, respectable, and diligent landlords who have developed a very good and strong relationship with their tenants, and we don’t hear about them. Unfortunately, in any business when the opportunity arises for some to take money, they do. That’s unfortunate, but that’s a fact of the system we live in. It creates enormous wealth, but it comes with its problem. It’s what we call the price of prosperity. The responsibility for setting rental rates is the responsibility of the marketplace.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government couldn’t be more clear.

I’ll go on to condo conversions, and the memo says: “There is this mistruth floating out there that condo conversions are evil. The condo market is responding to the housing needs of Albertans. That is how the free market works.” Sounds like the minister. “If there was no need for condo’s then there wouldn’t be any conversions.” So is it the position of the government that there’s no problem with condo conversions and that regardless as to whether or not people get put out on the street, it’s the right of the people who own the buildings to convert into condominiums?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Yeah, I guess I would like to make that perfectly clear. Yes, it is their right as an owner of a property to use it as they do. We are, Mr. Speaker, introducing legislation that will limit the notification time to that to make it fair. Obviously, it’s not just as easy to pack up and move to another spot whether you’re moving from a house, a condo, or an apartment. Converting a condo from a rental to an ownership doesn’t decrease the housing availability. It may move someone into what they consider an affordable housing unit and open up where they were. So it’s a negative sum game. You have ownership or rentership. It still accommodates people.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. members, before I recognize the next question, I’d like to caution the leader of the third party. You are familiar with the rule of this House that we do not mention members’ names in the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

#### **Enmax Electricity Transmission Line**

**Ms Haley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On the 19th of April Enmax Corporation announced its intention to build a 1,200-megawatt power plant, and they indicated in their press release that this new power plant would generate enough power for about two-thirds of Calgary’s requirements. My constituents in Airdrie-Chestermere have been told for the past two years that a new transmission line that will go across their land is needed to prevent problems with power shortages for Calgary. This power is not to be

used for export, yet Enmax is now boasting about being able to export power with the addition of this new proposed plant. In light of the new plant that Enmax wants to build, will the minister revisit the need for the transmission line so that my constituents can stop worrying about what will happen to their homes and land if the transmission line continues?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, what I will say is that we welcome the news from Enmax, a great asset, again, to the province of Alberta. It indicates that the robust system that we put in place with respect to the utility in Alberta is working.

With respect to the line itself, the line is still required. Whether or not Enmax out of Calgary develops 1,200 megawatts, AESO’s requirement on the 10-year plan in southern Alberta – 8,000 megawatts of electricity would be required in Alberta. So the line would still be required.

**Ms Haley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I get confused when I hear that, because my constituents have been told that the power needs for Calgary are the reason for this transmission line, yet SNC-Lavalin is now building a tie-in between Great Falls, Montana, and Lethbridge. We have Enmax building a 1,200-megawatt power plant, which apparently now they can utilize for export. Why the need for the transmission line? I don’t understand.

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, you know, the suggested use for this power that Enmax is going to put on, whether it’s exported or used internally, the transmission system, the heart of the system to provide reliable and consistent electricity for all Albertans, is the core and the backbone of the system in the province of Alberta. In order to allow the movement of electricity either into or out of the province of Alberta, the transmission system must be fortified. This particular piece of business in front of us with respect to a 500-kV line is necessary.

**Ms Haley:** Well, given that the minister indicates that it is necessary, I’m going to ask him if he can assure my constituents of two things. First, the way the system was utilized to decide that this transmission was needed: will he do a fairness review of it to ensure that my constituents were treated fairly? Also, will a second look be given at putting this transmission line underground instead of overtop on huge towers?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, technology with respect to the transmission systems globally changes on an ongoing basis. This particular line, that now is in hearings with the EUB, certainly uses technology that is current for the time. We do not have in front of us, that I’m aware of, the technology and capability to move the amount of power that we require to move over the distances that we require with buried cable at this point in time. In the future is that possible? I wouldn’t hazard a guess to say that it is or isn’t. All I can say is that this particular line is in front of the EUB as an application currently, and they will deal with it.

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

#### **Autism Spectrum Disorder**

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disorder that affects thousands of Albertans.

High-quality care and intensive intervention can dramatically improve the quality of life of children with autism and their families. The needs of children with autism are assessed by a multi-disciplinary team that offers recommendations and determines eligibility for services. To the Minister of Children's Services: since the expertise of each team member is essential in making these critical decisions, can the minister please tell us how their knowledge and expertise regarding autism are assessed?

1:50

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children's Services, the MLA for Banff-Cochrane, is away today. [interjections] I'm sorry.

Certainly, I want to indicate that, you know, we as a province take autism very, very seriously, and I will pass on the comments to the minister.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. minister, you are aware of violating that rule as well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have some serious questions, and I will continue. The multidisciplinary teams play the biggest role in deciding the level of services available to children with autism on a case-by-case basis. We've heard concerns that wait times for assessment delay access to necessary services, that team members do not always meet with the children they are supposed to assess, and that the process lacks transparency. To the Minister of Children's Services: what reviews of these multidisciplinary teams have been completed to date to ensure that the best practices are in place?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, I will take the questions under advisement and pass them on to the minister.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I could ask for written responses to these questions.

I have another one for the representative of the minister. Many children with autism spectrum disorder are not receiving the care that they need to become safe, healthy, and independent adults. We have heard from stakeholders and constituents that it is common for services for children with autism to receive yearly rollbacks. This leads to a lengthy appeals process and unnecessary stress on families. Again to the representative of the Minister of Children's Services: can the minister tell us when families can expect to receive the stable funding and services they need for their children without roadblocks?

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I certainly appreciate the questions, and I will ensure that the minister receives those questions. Thank you.

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

## Calgary Municipal Funding

(continued)

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering the phenomenal growth in Calgary, complaints have been made that recent funding announcements are proportionately inappropriate. My first question is to the minister of municipal affairs. How close does \$400 million come to meeting the actual needs of Calgarians, and does this handcuff the mayor of Calgary?

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the minister of municipal affairs. This funding announcement I think is critical when we put it into the context of the overall budget of government. As you know, there was a commitment made by our Premier and by our government that over a three-year period of time \$1.4 billion that is currently used by the provincial government and is part of the requisition to municipalities on property taxes for education would be replaced with dollars from general revenue. That's exactly what has taken place . . .

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Finance. The mayor of Calgary has accused the provincial government of shortchanging the city in the budget both in terms of amounts dedicated to certain identified needs and with regard to the total dollar figure. Can the minister please put in context how Calgarians have done in this budget compared to previous years, including two years ago when \$1 billion was given to the city for infrastructure with no strings attached?

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In this budget alone for the city of Calgary there is roughly 5 and a half billion dollars worth of funding. That's 5 and a half billion dollars that is going to the city of Calgary. We're seeing \$272 million simply for the \$600 million municipal infrastructure program plus a fuel tax. If the hon. member remembers, we gave 5 cents a litre to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary to be utilized for their infrastructure needs.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the cities of Calgary and Edmonton and all of the province are doing extremely well. We have increased funding 600 per cent in the last four years – six times in the last four years – to municipalities.

**Mr. Rodney:** My final supplementary is indeed to the Minister of Finance as well. Minister of Finance, what can Calgarians look forward to specifically with respect to provincial funding for the city of Calgary in the near future?

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Included in this budget is \$2.2 billion for the health region. There's \$1.3 billion for education. There's \$704 million for postsecondary education. We also have to remember that there's a ring road being built. There's a huge ring road that's being built around the city. There's a south Calgary hospital. It goes on and on and on. We're in this province together, and it's time we started looking at a partnership as opposed to a fight.



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

### Continuing Care Standards

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Major cracks in the walls, water stains behind electrical panels, flooding in the basement, mould and mushroom growth in the crawl space, multiple incidents of fire, and two out of three exits that would be virtually useless in the event of an emergency evacuation. No, I'm not talking about the Legislature Annex. These are some of the ongoing problems that put the safety of staff and residents at risk at the Good Samaritan Pembina Village in Evansburg. My questions are to the minister of health. Does the minister think that it's appropriate for vulnerable seniors, many of whom require wheelchairs and walkers, to live in a building with so many hazards and risks to their health and safety?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One would hope that no senior would have to live in inappropriate housing or in any housing that would provide risk to their health or safety. As to the particular circumstances enunciated by the hon. member, I'm not sure that I can agree that those are the circumstances in place, but I'll be more than happy to have an investigation.\*

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Minister, but these issues are not new. They were all identified by the Health Facilities Review Committee in 2004. There has been a follow-up report, and three years later local health and safety professionals are distressed that these problems still have not been addressed. What is the point of having a committee that can't monitor and enforce compliance?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very important to have a committee who will review health facilities across the province and make reports. It's also very important to follow up on those reports, and I certainly indicate that I will follow up on the report to determine what, in fact, has happened in that case.

The hon. member will know, as she's been shadowing me for the last four months, that health is a very big portfolio with lots of facilities. It's a big portfolio, so for her to expect me to respond to a particular report on a given day without having any advance notice of it is quite inappropriate. But I'm more than happy to look into it and see what has happened in that particular instance because we're all concerned about the quality of life of seniors in this province and their ability to live in appropriate housing.

**The Acting Speaker:** Second supplementary. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Well, the minister has had not one but two reports on this particular facility, and the Auditor General's 2005 report on seniors' care clearly stated that the Health Facilities Review Committee "[does] not inspect facilities for compliance with the Basic Standards and [does] not have enforcement mechanisms to ensure that facilities rectify non-compliance." Will the minister finally eliminate the ineffective Health Facilities Review Committee and put its \$881,000 budget toward real monitoring and enforcement?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I can advise the House that we are currently undergoing a review of governance and accountability

structures with respect to RHAs and other health authorities and with respect to every aspect of the health department. We'll include the facilities review committee and their role, mandate, and purpose. So I'll be more than happy to take the advice of the member with respect to whether there are some roles and responsibilities that could be added or other issues. I'll be more than happy to have her advice and the advice of any other members of this House as to how we can do a more effective job of ensuring that housing and health care for our seniors and for all Albertans is up to the highest quality.

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

### Barley Research

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently met with representatives from the Alberta Barley Commission regarding Alberta Agriculture and Food's malt barley research program, which takes place at Lacombe. During this meeting I was informed that the research program was being phased out and that fewer researchers are working on barley projects. This is of concern to the many Albertans who rely on malt barley to make a living. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Is barley research at Lacombe being discontinued, and if so, why?

2:00

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Minister for Agriculture and Food.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Barley research at the Field Crop Development Centre in Lacombe is not being discontinued. Our current research investment is however being redirected to focus on barley and triticale for food and biofuel use. Two other organizations currently in western Canada have malt barley programs like our current research program, so we're investing in new research projects that will set Albertans apart, and we're not going to reinvent the wheel.

**Mr. Johnson:** To the same minister. The barley sector is an important part of Alberta's agricultural industry. What other research initiatives relative to this sector are being conducted or supported by your department?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of exciting research taking place today. We've invested very heavily in genetic research to increase profit for our farmers. This research will focus on things like increasing yield and nutrition, improving water efficiency, and protecting crops from diseases and pests. Our scientists are also working on a new technology that can evaluate the attributes and the quality of a crop. This technology has the incredible potential to result in payment to grain farmers based on the quality of their crops rather than payment on the bushel or by the tonne.

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

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you. My final supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister tell the House what else is being done to encourage and promote agricultural research in his department, and does it really benefit the producers?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker. Research is vital. For example, the Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences Alberta, also known as IFASA, brings together scientists from Agriculture and Food, the University of Alberta, the Alberta Research Council, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. They focus on research into a number of priorities: value-added meat

\*See p. 770, right col., para. 6

products, managing soil nutrients and the environment, feed grain quality and supply, and, of course, our new bioenergy products.

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

### Royalty Revenues

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Energy censored hundreds of pages in the royalty review documents that it tabled two weeks ago. One of the censored charts, that is available publicly in the Department of Energy's library, reveals that Alberta takes 5 per cent less than Wyoming, 6 per cent less than Colorado, 8 per cent less than Oklahoma, 10 per cent less than New Mexico, and 12 per cent less than both Louisiana and Texas. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. How many of the other censored documents also show that this government does not collect a fair share in royalties for Albertans, the owners of the resource?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the hon. member indicates what has been done by this ministry and by this government. To be open, transparent, and fair, I have tabled in the Legislature certain documents related to a previous royalty review. In those documents that were tabled here, there were some exceptions. Again, department staff working with respect to the FOIP requirements may have severed some pieces of those documents; however, what I did say was that I had the department then put all of the documents on public review in the library. That's where the information came from.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy can't get his story straight. Two weeks ago he said that Texas is the best oil- and gas-producing state to compare Alberta to when looking at royalties. When the truth was revealed, showing that Texas collects much more in royalties, the minister changed his story, saying that it isn't fair to compare Alberta to other jurisdictions. Again to the Minister of Energy: how many millions of dollars have been lost due to this government's failure to collect a fair share of royalties on behalf of Albertans? How much money have you squandered and lost?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, absolutely none. I can tell you today as I stand here that the development that's happened in the province of Alberta, the development that's happened in the country of Canada, the development that's happened that does provide tremendous asset and tremendous resource for the country, for the province, for North America, and globally would not – would not – have taken place without the foresight of this government in 1996 and 1997 to put a generic oil sands royalty system in place. This hon. member picks a piece out of Texas. If he wants to compare the royalties in Alberta with Texas, ask him to make comparisons with the deep gulf drilling.

**Mr. MacDonald:** I just may do that because I know what I'll find.

Again to the Minister of Energy: why did this government fail to increase royalty rates when two years ago your own officials in the Department of Energy stated, and I quote: we are not capturing our fair share at high prices. End of quote. Why didn't you increase royalties to a fair rate then?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member opposite will know that two years ago I wasn't standing here. Look ahead. Look to the future. Don't look behind you. We're working with this. We're working with the situation, and this hon. member absolutely refuses to listen. I answered a question last week which very clearly indicated that last year we changed four – count them: one, two, three, four – royalty systems, that took back \$300 million for Albertans. [interjections]

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

### Affordable Housing

*(continued)*

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Speaker, I think you said Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Speaker, it should be clear to everybody, including members opposite, that we still have a housing crisis in this province. Landlords are taking advantage of the economy to actually gouge renters. The government has a responsibility to all Albertans. Of calls into my office, a couple of examples: Beverly McGowan, rent increased \$375 past six months, 69 years of age, wondering about how she's going to pay the rent; Pat Reddy; Patrick Quigley, rent increased \$250, rent will now take three-quarters of the income. Yesterday we asked just to even have a debate in a policy field committee. Government members turned us down. My question is to the Government House Leader. Would the Government House Leader agree that this is precisely the kind of . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. member, as I said, I will be enforcing the 45-second rule. I don't know if any minister wants to respond to that comment.

Second question.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, the minister may not want to answer it because it's a serious problem.

This is precisely what we talked about, having policy field committees dealing with real issues. My question is: why would the government not bring this to a policy field committee?

**Mr. Hancock:** I think that's an excellent idea, but it's one of many excellent ideas, and it should only be taken into consideration when we discuss how to move forward with additional policy discussion around the question of affordable housing. It's one of the things that a policy field committee could do, but it's one of many options that need to be taken into account by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and by the government in determining how to move to the next step on this.

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Speaker, that's all very well and dandy. People's rents are going up. We can't even have a debate in the policy field committee: that's what we're saying. What I'm saying to this minister as the Government House Leader who believes in the policy field committees is: why wouldn't he use his authority and say: "Look, this is a real issue for real Albertans. Let's have it go back to the policy field committee"? Would he provide that leadership?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, what was inappropriate was the method by which the hon. member attempted to hijack the House yesterday by bringing a Standing Order 42 motion to try and accomplish indirectly what he can't accomplish directly. What can be done is that when policy field committees are set up, there may be an opportunity for a resolution to ask the policy field committee

to deal with that as an issue, or it may be something that the committee can deal with by itself, but it's entirely inappropriate for the hon. member to ask for the House's business to be adjourned under Standing Order 42, which is what he was trying to do. That's what he was trying to do: use an inappropriate method to raise an appropriate issue. I'm all alive to the question of how we do policy discussion in this House.

#### 2:10 Freehold Mineral Rights

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the Minister of Energy is still all worked up, but I'd like to ask him a few more questions. Recently I received some calls from constituents who are owners of freehold mineral rights. Last month the Energy and Utilities Board upheld the application for 28 well licences for coal-bed methane on split-title lands. This ruling indicates that those parties that held the natural gas rights also held the rights to the coal-bed methane. This issue is of significant interest to freehold mineral rights owners. My questions today are to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister advise this Assembly whether this decision is legally binding?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This particular issue and the EUB's ruling with respect to the 28 is not legally binding. The EUB hearing arose on freehold mineral lands where one party was the holder of the coal rights and another party or other parties had leased the gas rights. Both claimed legal entitlement to the coal-bed methane. They're private disputes. In these particular ones the mineral title owners have legal options available to them if they wish to pursue them, and in this case the EUB has laid out a path forward.

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what effect does this ruling by the EUB have on the other split-title lands located throughout our province and the mineral rights associated with them?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is an extremely complex issue because the ownership of coal-bed methane ultimately depends on the wording of some of the original mineral grants, and some of these go back many, many years. For that reason, the EUB decision, while it provides clarity with respect to the issue of entitlement on these particular leases, only deals with those specific situations, and it doesn't apply to other mineral rights.

**Mr. Doerksen:** Minister, you're going to be receiving petitions from these people that are affected asking the government of Alberta to take immediate steps to introduce directive, retroactive legislation applicable to both Crown and freehold lands stating that CBM is a natural gas. As minister are you prepared to bring this legislation forward?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time we don't have plans to put forward legislation to deal with the issue. Of course, I'm very aware that individuals on both sides of the issue are coming forward with respect to lobbying on behalf of their particular side of the issue. We deal with thousands of mineral grants in the province of Alberta, and it makes it extremely difficult at this point in time to implement encompassing legislation. However, we continue to

monitor the situation. We're certainly taking it very seriously, and we understand that there are many Albertans quite concerned and interested in the outcome.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

#### Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Education was asked an important question about the surprise offer on the teachers' unfunded pension liability. His answers did not satisfy the Official Opposition and certainly not the Alberta teachers. The minister stated that his pension deal has nothing to do with labour negotiations, yet his letter to the ATA states that if teachers strike, the deal could be off. This will clearly bias the bargaining process. To the Minister of Education: why is the minister using the unfunded liability to control and manipulate the Alberta teachers?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that this was not a surprise offer. This was a good-faith initiative by the government which will go ahead. This good-faith initiative by government is all about recruitment and retention of the best young teachers in the business.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April I presented a motion urging this government to immediately initiate negotiations to find a reasonable term solution to the teachers' unfunded liability situation. At that time the minister said that an agreement would be negotiated with the Alberta Teachers' Association and pledged that he would not politicize the issue. The minister now has taken the exact opposite approach. To the Minister of Education: how can the minister explain his complete flip-flop on the unfunded pension liability question?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, let's put the truth out on the table. What we have done is given a short-term, one-year, good faith initiative to ensure that our young teachers stay in the profession while we negotiate a long-term resolution with the Alberta Teachers' Association, and that will take place over the course of the next year after we have some input from the task force that will look at all of the options to ensure that we get the very best basis to get a long-term resolution.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A letter giving an ultimatum is not negotiation.

The minister previously promised in this House that a deal on the unfunded pension liability will be reached through negotiation with Alberta teachers. This has not occurred. To the Minister of Education: if the minister is confident in his plan or his process of getting this solved, why didn't he discuss this with the Alberta teachers? What are you afraid of, Mr. Minister? What are you afraid of?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, the \$25 million good faith offer is not a negotiation. This is a good faith offer on the part of government, so there's nothing to negotiate. What we will negotiate is a long-term resolution. I'm not sure what part of the last answer the hon. member didn't understand, but it's the long-term resolution that we will negotiate with the ATA, and this particular offer in the budget is free money.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

#### Land-use Framework Consultation

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of my constituents expressed interest in providing input to the land-use framework consultation. The first session will be held in West Yellowhead, in Edson, on May 14. My question is for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How much is the minister planning to encourage Albertans about this very complex topic of land use in Alberta?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to report to this House that from May 14 to 31 there'll be 17 public sessions where Albertans will have the opportunity to share their views on land use with Sustainable Resource Development and the government of Alberta. We're encouraging all Albertans to participate in this process. For those that are listening or watching today, you can find the dates and locations at [www.landuse.gov.ab.ca](http://www.landuse.gov.ab.ca) or call toll-free at 310-4455. There'll also be ads in the newspapers advertising these meetings.

Thank you.

2:20

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What format will the sessions take, and how can the public be assured their comments will be used?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, we're very anxious to hear from Albertans on this. These meetings will go from approximately 2 in the afternoon until the evening, so it's flexible to meet people's time schedules. There are two very interesting pamphlets that will be available. One is a workbook; the other explains. These can be sent in. We'll be reading these results, and they'll be fed into the final result.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Mr. Strang:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. What should I tell my constituents about the media reports that the Alberta government is considering user fees for rugged trails designed for all-terrain vehicles?

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you for that question, hon. member. This is an opportunity to clarify earlier remarks. We have been there. Very specifically, I have been in consultation with off-road vehicle users interested in improving the quality of off-road trails and recreation in our forests. They are the ones that brought the issue of fees to improve the trails and bridges and so forth to protect the environment. But I want to clarify: this does not apply to parks. Okay, fellows? It doesn't apply to parks. This is forestry land-use areas. I would like to report that I'll be spending the May long weekend and also June 2 with various off-road vehicle groups in southern Alberta examining this issue.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. members, the time allocated for question period has now elapsed.

Hon. members, before we proceed with Tabling Returns and Reports, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today we have with us in the members' gallery 38 guests from the Trochu Valley high school. This is a school that is very astute in bringing the class up here every year and teaching parliamentary democracy. Unfortunately, only one of the class could come up for the MLA for a Day program, so the class did the next best thing: they all came. We have with the class of 38 their teachers Mrs. Fran Winther and Mr. Bill Cunningham. I'd ask them to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I looked up in the gallery, I also noticed another former page of the Assembly, Natalie Wilson. Natalie's mother is a teacher in Calmar. Her brother is currently a page. I see him sitting over there. I'm going to ask if Natalie would stand in the public gallery and also receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**  
(*continued*)

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituent Jim Sexsmith, who is a senior. He is on a fixed income, no savings, dependent on oxygen. He has emphysema, living in an apartment, and can't find another place. The rent has increased this year and another 20 per cent increase coming very soon. No affordable home available for seniors, and he needs some help. I have five copies.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the Minister of Education to the Alberta Teachers' Association regarding the teachers' unfunded pension liability.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is from a constituent, Deb Newman, who is saying: "Is there no way that we can stop this robbery? Has no one in government considered that it is time to bring back 'rent control'?"

The other one is from Velvet Martin about children with special needs. She says:

The most cost-effective way to manage government funding for children with special needs is via support of natural family involvement. Families faced with life-altering changes when a child is

born/develops severe disability are as vulnerable as the children themselves. Natural parents must be encouraged and regarded as valued, responsible care-givers.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings with the appropriate number of copies. One is notes for a statement from the independent Member for Edmonton-Manning on April 30, 2007, which was not given unanimous consent in this Assembly. It speaks to the workers' day of mourning.

Another is from Gary Hunt and the citizens' rights group operated by Victims of Violence. It speaks to a meeting this Saturday at Sacred Heart Church from 12 to 4 p.m. to build an organization for victims' and citizens' rights, to implement changes to help them.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I introduced one of my constituents, Brianne Hudson. I'd like to table a letter that she sent to me that's also got a petition attached to it that is signed by all of the tenants of the Sierra building. They write that they support the legislation that is supposed to be introduced – and we were actually expecting it today – which would limit the number of times landlords could raise the rent to once per year. They feel that there is a great need for rent control in the province and also ask that rent not be increased by more than 5 per cent per year. So on behalf of those tenants of the Sierra building – and I congratulate them on their advocacy – I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of their submission to the Assembly.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. members, on your table there was a ribbon placed today. It's a card and a pin, Give the Gift of Life, from the Minister of Health and Wellness in recognition of National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week.

As well, hon. members, the Government House Leader had tabled the calendar for the Committee of Supply, and I believe there are some changes in it. I'm given to understand that the Government House Leader will be tabling a revised version before the end of the day. Would you like to speak to that matter?

**Mr. Hancock:** I just wanted to draw the House's attention to the fact that we switched, actually, May 14 and May 15. We got the departments right, but we forgot to switch the designated parties. So May 14 should be the New Democrats with the ministries of Energy and Environment, and May 15 in the evening should be the Liberals with the ministries of Infrastructure and Transportation and Employment, Immigration and Industry. We will correct that for the record.

**The Acting Speaker:** Very well. The record will reflect that. Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**  
 head: **Government Motions**  
**Provincial Fiscal Policies**

17. Dr. Oberg moved:

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

[Adjourned debate April 19: Ms Blakeman]

**The Acting Speaker:** The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of all Albertans and as Leader of the Official Opposition, this extraordinary caucus of people, it's my duty and my privilege to rise and respond to the budget delivered in this Assembly two weeks ago.

The first budget of the Stelmach government represents, in our view, a colossal failure of vision. We need to start saving now to build a sustainable future for Alberta, but the government has ignored the need to save for the future. Instead, they've given us a fire alarm budget that drowns the political fires of today in a flood of nonrenewable oil sands cash while ignoring the needs of tomorrow.

When I responded to last year's budget, I said that there were a few things to like. The same holds true this year. For example, it's good to see that at long last the government is doing something to address the province's massive infrastructure debt, even if action is coming years too late. There's a little more money for AISH. There's some funding for the Water for Life strategy and a little more support for the arts. But, by and large, this is a panicky, hurry up and spend budget prompted by a growing crisis of confidence among Albertans, confidence lost because the government's abject failure to plan for the boom has led to economic chaos and declining public services.

When people are stuck for hours in emergency rooms – and just yesterday we brought a tragic example to this Assembly – when children can't get to school because there aren't enough buses to go around, when there aren't enough child care spaces or affordable housing units to serve even a fraction of Albertans seeking them out, you know that this government has a serious problem. So out comes the money hose, crank open the valve, hurry up and spend before people really start getting mad. Tragically, even the good aspects of this budget, particularly the long overdue funding for infrastructure, will have their positive impact dramatically lessened by the inflation and labour shortages that are the legacies of this very government's failure to plan. Health care is still the number one concern on Albertan's minds. Where is the planning to make health care accessible again? Construction still hasn't begun on Calgary's desperately needed new hospital. The people of Calgary shouldn't have to wait any longer to know with certainty that they are going to get their hospital.

Along with this flood of cash comes an unprecedented abandonment of responsibility. Instead of tackling issues such as affordable housing or implementing the Water for Life strategy, the provincial government forks over money, then tells our already overloaded municipal governments to go and solve the problems on their own. The government could have saved Albertans untold stress had they simply implemented the Alberta Liberal affordable housing strategy. Instead, they throw money at the problem, throw the problem at our cities, and wash their hands of the affair.

2:30

This budget was designed to win back the favour of the hundreds of thousands of disgruntled Albertans who have lost faith in a tired and visionless Tory regime. It's one of the worst examples of short-term, self-serving political manoeuvring I've seen.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has to do better. It has to start looking past politics because the very future of our province is at stake, nothing less than that. In a time of unparalleled opportunity it's time for budgets that look ahead. Instead, the government has given us a budget designed to cover up the mistakes of the past. One day soon, unless we change the way we budget right away, our government is going to turn on that money hose and experience a shock when only a few pennies trickle out. How will the government put out its self-inflicted political fires when that happens?

Tory governments have taken huge oil and gas revenues for granted. The various oil booms have led the Tories to believe that they can spend their way out of any crisis, and this from a so-called conservative regime. So now we have an oil sands boom and a return to familiar but badly outdated patterns of thinking. When presented with a huge windfall – and oil and gas revenues are exactly that – any sensible Albertan would take some time to come up with a plan for the money. At the very least we should be asking ourselves what we want to achieve. I believe and the Alberta Liberals believe that the answer is clear: we should be building a sustainable legacy for Alberta's future so that when the oil and gas run out, tomorrow's Albertans won't be left holding the bag.

Other oil-blessed governments have developed strategies to handle nonrenewable resource revenues. In Alaska, for example, the people decided to save the oil money and pay themselves personal dividends each year. In Norway they decided to keep taxes high and participate directly in the oil industry through a huge state oil company that, Mr. Speaker, I might note is considering investing in the oil sands because it's such a bargain here. The Norwegians then have put royalties in the bank with an obsession, a total amount exceeding \$250 billion. In Dubai they launched a strategy to turn their dusty desert kingdom into a global financial retail and tourist centre for the exact reason that they knew that oil and gas revenues were nonrenewable. In Dubai it has worked, and that little kingdom is now a destination for people from around the world.

None of those strategies is exactly right for Alberta, but at least all of those jurisdictions had a strategy. They stuck with it, and today they have something to show for it. In contrast this Alberta government is spending our wealth as fast as it comes out of the ground. Over the course of the last several years the Tory government has grown more and more dependent upon nonrenewable oil and gas revenues to fund government services.

Last year the Alberta government spent about \$8,500 per person while collecting only \$6,300 in sustainable revenues. That's a sustainability gap of \$2,200 per Albertan. This government makes up the difference by spending our oil and gas revenues, and this budget that we are debating now widens the gap all the more. Now we're looking at a dangerous chasm. If we don't close the gap with sustainable funding – and this government shows no sign that it even recognizes the sustainability gap, Mr. Speaker – we're looking at deficits, cuts in services, tax hikes, or all of the above.

This government knows by now what an Alberta Liberal government would do to solve the problem. We'd take the bold step of actually saving some of Alberta's nonrenewable resource revenues for tomorrow. What a concept. This government had an opportunity to vote for an Alberta Liberal bill that would have saved 30 per cent of all nonrenewable resource revenues, savings that would have closed the sustainability gap and secured financial stability for decades to come. [interjections] I'm getting heckling from government members about doing the math. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that we have done the math. We've worked with the economists. We've worked with the business leaders. It's our plan they're endorsing, not this government's.

The legislation we introduced as our flagship bill, had it not been rejected by the government, would have reinvigorated the heritage fund so much so that in 20 years the Alberta government would earn more from heritage fund investments than from oil and gas, freeing us from the boom-and-bust cycles of resource-based economies. Endowments for the arts and postsecondary education would have given Alberta truly world-class universities and colleges and a booming arts scene with stable, sustainable, dependable funding at last.

Am I driven by this issue, Mr. Speaker? Do I bring it up at every opportunity? You bet I do. I'm driven by the idea of saving these

once-in-a-lifetime revenues because I know how vital those savings are to our future. Without a plan for saving these precious revenues, this Tory budget is a failure. When it comes right down to it, well-planned, visionary budgets help Albertans.

To those who say that Alberta cannot afford to build the heritage fund and long-term endowments, we say that Alberta cannot afford not to do so. With a clear vision of what we want our oil and gas revenues to achieve, we can create a world-class postsecondary institution, we can fund a school nutrition program so that no child in the province goes hungry, we can provide substantial and sustainable support for the arts, we can help Albertans with disabilities with regular increases for things like autism programs and AISH, and we can make sure that Albertans never again have to put up with a lack of affordable housing, schools, or health care. Where are the long-term, sustainable, regular increases to front-line staff for people with developmental disabilities? Where is the sustainable funding for long-term care beds and staff?

Saving a portion of our nonrenewable resource revenues is one key to a sustainable future. A second is education. You can't go wrong when you invest in education. For example, when students slip behind in math or reading in the elementary grades, we want them to get the boost they need. Educators today can predict with almost perfect accuracy the specific children who will drop out of high school by checking to see if a student in grades 3 or 4 is below their grade level in reading and arithmetic. So let's have a budget that invests in the programs that will help those kids achieve their full potential.

Or imagine a future in which our universities rank alongside Cambridge and Harvard and Berkeley, where NAIT and SAIT rank with MIT, where people come from around the world for the privilege of studying at Alberta's colleges and universities and trade schools. Long after our oil and gas has lost its value, education will carry Alberta forward. [interjections] The Minister of Energy is heckling away. He's suggesting that oil and gas will last a thousand years. Is that right, Mr. Minister? Apparently not.

Our postsecondary endowments and our commitment to primary education will when we form government ensure that a solid education system will always be there to serve Albertans. In the meantime in this budget school boards will have to settle for a paltry 3 per cent increase that doesn't even cover inflation. Mr. Speaker, you can be sure that the Alberta Liberals are not looking forward to the labour unrest that this short-sighted budget is almost guaranteed to foster.

Good budgets are crucial to Albertans who need a little help. We'd like to see support for AISH recipients increased at the same rate as MLA salaries. We'd like to see a provincial school nutrition program funded so that children don't have to go to school hungry. It is shameful, Mr. Speaker, that the only province in this country that doesn't provide school nutrition funding is Alberta. And we'd like to see the elimination of Canada's most unfair tax: the Alberta health care premiums. [interjections] Again I'm getting heckling about doing the math. Mr. Speaker, I'll put my math skills against the minister of agriculture any day of the week.

2:40

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. members, when the Minister of Finance tabled his budget, he was given the opportunity and latitude to speak and to finish his comments. Please allow the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to bring his remarks to this Assembly.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'd like to see the elimination of Canada's most unfair tax, the Alberta health care premiums. This is a regressive tax that hurts everyone, its only purpose to serve

Conservative ideology. Get rid of it and help thousands of Alberta families get that much closer to making ends meet. These are manageable commitments that have big benefits.

The third key to a bright future is caring for the environment. This year's fire alarm budget missed the biggest fire of all: the threat of climate change and pollution to our land, air, and water. The budget barely acknowledged the need to respond to climate change despite the growing need for a comprehensive plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

An Alberta Liberal government would immediately implement a climate change strategy including actions such as substantial funding for carbon capture and sequestration, for clean technology research, and for a building retrofit program to help Albertans pay for energy-efficient upgrades to their homes, yet there's no increase in this budget for Alberta Environment this year at a time when we need real government leadership on climate change. Alberta is the front line in the battle against global warming, but this budget leaves Albertans fighting without ammunition.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is at a crossroads. If we continue as we have in the past, we will stumble into the future one ad hoc budget after another until one day we realize that we've let our astonishing opportunity pass us by. Or we can seize the moment. We can wake up to that opportunity and build a future of unparalleled success with budgets that close the sustainability gap and save for the future.

I'd like to quote Charles Darwin. "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." Mr. Speaker, this is a government that willfully ignores change, and by doing so, it is jeopardizing Alberta's future. Tomorrow's historians may well look back upon this budget and say: this is when Alberta finally lost its chance to build a sustainable future. This is when the Conservatives failed to take advantage of their last opportunity to adapt to a changing world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a pleasure to rise and speak to the budget for 2007 of the provincial government and the first budget tabled by the cabinet appointed by the new Premier of our province. This budget focuses very much on repairing the damage that has been done over the last 10 or more years by the Conservative government by its failure to invest in Alberta's infrastructure, and that is not only the new infrastructure that is needed for growth but also that which is necessary to repair and maintain the infrastructure which we have.

Mr. Speaker, when the former Premier, Ralph Klein, came to office, he came with a vow to eliminate Alberta's debt, which was at that time \$23 billion. Much of what has been done in terms of paying down that debt has been done at the expense of investment in our infrastructure. In fact, when you add up the numbers, you will find that the debt that this province now owes in infrastructure which needs to be repaired or replaced or new infrastructure which is required to meet the growth of this province is very close to that figure. In other words, Mr. Speaker, what the government has done is create a shell game with Albertans. They have taken a financial debt and converted it into a debt on the infrastructure which is of a similar magnitude. So the debt is not gone at all. It has not been paid off by this government as this government has claimed has been done. Rather, it's simply been put into unmet costs for infrastructure. So we have an enormous debt remaining, and that debt is in our roads. It's in our hospitals. It's in our bridges. It's in our schools. But it is still a debt that future generations of this province will have to pay.

To give the government a little bit of credit, Mr. Speaker, they have attempted in this budget to begin to address that, so we've seen a dramatic increase in funding for infrastructure. But they've waited too late because now with the economy booming, with such demand for construction projects in the tar sands and other parts of the economy, the inflation rate has eaten up much of the spending that the government has allocated towards this infrastructure. So instead of buying new bridges or schools or hospitals at a rate that the government could afford, we're now expending perhaps 50 per cent more in order to obtain those things.

The problem as we see it, Mr. Speaker, is that the ordinary people of this province have been forgotten in this budget and in this rush to rectify past mistakes. Working and middle-class families have been ignored. They have been left behind by this government. Albertans with low incomes in particular will see their cost of living increase because of essential program funding in the budget which doesn't even keep pace with Alberta's soaring inflation rate. Rents are increasing and will continue to rise while the government turns its back on rent review and rent increase guidelines. Utility costs are rising as a result of the province's failed experiment with deregulation.

Mr. Speaker, inflation is eating up the gains of Alberta families in this period of economic growth. The last time inflation in Alberta was as high as it is today was in 1991. Alberta's inflation is almost double the next highest in the country. Municipalities like the city of Edmonton have said that they expect inflation on their construction costs to reach 25 or 30 per cent this year.

The government's general budgeting practices have not changed. The Premier and the Minister of Finance have adopted their predecessor's practice of underestimating revenues and lowballing oil and gas prices. In his budget speech the Finance minister trumpeted a new plan for how to allocate surpluses. The NDP opposition expects him to keep this promise and will monitor the government closely. The surplus allocation warrants discussion. It's a clear indication that the Tories are planning for unplanned surpluses to continue, so the risk that government shuffles this money into slush funds also continues.

Mr. Speaker, the budget fails to see the needs of its most vulnerable citizens as a priority. The Edmonton Social Planning Council points out that increases to vulnerable Albertans who depend on income supports are going up by only 5 per cent and in some cases not at all. AISH monthly benefits increased by 5 per cent to \$1,050 effective April 1. This year's increase should allow AISH recipients living in subsidized accommodation to just keep pace with inflation, but those not living in subsidized accommodation will fall even further behind.

The modest \$18 million increase to Alberta seniors' benefits this year will likely be used to cover the growing number of seniors eligible for the benefit. A 14.7 per cent increase has gone into funding for seniors' lodges, which will allow for the addition of 250 more lodge units.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, there's not enough funding for child care in this budget, not nearly enough to cover the gap created by the cancellation of the child care and early childhood learning agreement by the federal Conservative government. So the extra funding will not meet the needs. It will not go very far in helping create more child care spaces, which are desperately needed as waiting lists for spaces grow across the province. Nor is there relief in this budget for parents who have found a place for their child or children but struggle to continue to cover the cost of care. The NDP opposition supports affordable child care supported by public funding, which

gives families a real chance to choose the option that is right for them. We can give parents who are forced to stay at home the option of entering the workforce and give their children a head start on learning.

The budget falls short as well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to education. After accounting for inflation, per student funding will actually be lower this year than last. Without proper funding for teachers and classroom supplies children will be held back from their full potential. Across the province school boards have requested 172 new and replacement schools. The government has accepted 81 but has budgeted for fewer than half of them this year. Program funding, on the other hand, only received an increase of 5.5 per cent over last year. That's exactly the rate of inflation, so it really isn't an increase at all.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta School Boards Association points out that other sectors like the health regions were given more substantial increases, in the realm of 10 per cent, and this does not address upcoming teacher negotiations. They have criticized a shift towards prescribed funding and away from general funding, which the school boards can allocate as they see fit.

Of particular concern, Mr. Speaker, is that the government is holding out private partnerships as a panacea for building new schools. This method has failed. When a private company takes on a project to build a new school or a courthouse or a road, they borrow money to build the project. They borrow it at a higher rate than that available to the government, and they expect the government to pay back every penny that they have borrowed to build a project, to cover all of their costs plus a profit. So, fundamentally, it's an unescapable fact that P3s will always cost more than the traditional financing of government to build public projects. Not only that but the chances of shoddy workmanship, shortcuts, and other deficiencies exist as a very real concern.

Mr. Speaker, the government's approach to the rental crisis that we're now facing reminds me of someone whistling past the graveyard. There is tremendous upset in this province, right from one end of the province to the other, with respect to the costs of rent that people are being faced with, the gouging that is taking place. The government by slapping on a one rent increase per year rule has not dealt with the issue at all. It is seriously underestimating the seriousness of some of the rent increases that individuals are faced with. Any landlord that has not yet given a rent increase is eligible to increase the rent for any or all of his or her tenants as much as he wants.

We are seeing and we're hearing every day about rent increases of \$400, \$500 that people are being asked to pay, yet the government does nothing. It's pretty clear to me that many members opposite are feeling the heat from their constituents, particularly those that come from larger urban centres. You have to ask the question whether or not this new government has enough understanding of urban issues and the issues that face families that live in big cities in order to meet the needs of those people. I don't think that they do.

There are currently 9,000 households on waiting lists for all forms of affordable housing in Alberta. The task force on housing calculated that for 12,000 units to be built over the next five years, a cost of \$480 million per year for the next five years would be required. However, the government has said that it will build 11,200 units yet has promised only \$96 million in enhanced capital support and \$100 million in block funding to municipalities to address housing priorities in their community. Clearly, even though the government has put all of its stock in getting new housing on the market as an alternative to any sort of rent limitations, they have not provided the funding. They have not backed up their promise with real funding. Mr. Speaker, that underlines this government's

approach from start to finish: big promises, very small delivery. That has become a real feature of this government.

On health care the program spending is increased by 12.2 per cent, and the authorities are receiving a 9.5 increase in new funding, but these are just band-aid solutions. Mr. Speaker, ambulance funding has remained static. Health regions are desperate for help when it comes to wait times in emergency rooms, and the failure to address the need for more funding for ambulances means the government is only adding to this problem. The municipality of Wood Buffalo is receiving an increase of \$140 million, but that is not sufficient to meet the needs of this municipality. Eliminating health care premiums was a promise that the minister made in his campaign for the leadership of the Conservative party. Eliminating this premium would have put money directly in the pockets of working and middle-class Albertan family, but once again the government chose not to do so.

Mr. Speaker, just in closing, I want to say that regular Alberta families are still struggling in this economy to make ends meet. The budget is inflationary. The government's whole economic approach is inflationary. The massive capital spending is a response to years and years of neglect on the part of this province, and they are making lives more difficult for working and middle-class families. Rents are soaring. Entry-level housing has all but vanished. Utility costs continue to rise faster than the national average. Child care spaces are rare and expensive. The average Albertan family is approaching a tipping point where the cost of living negates the many benefits we enjoy in our province.

That's why the NDP has called on the government to reach out and help working families, to deliver a budget that strikes a balance between necessary infrastructure development and support for regular people and their families. Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the Finance minister have chosen to focus on bricks and mortar. Both of them are former infrastructure ministers, so they bear a great deal of responsibility for the mess that we're in today, but in their rush to repair and build the schools, roads, and hospitals that are so badly needed, they have forgotten the needs of ordinary people. This government has forgotten the needs of ordinary people. Working families, middle-class families have not been adequately supported by this government and by this budget.

The government has a blind spot when it comes to the people that they were elected to represent. They are more concerned about helping and assisting the development of oil sands, not for the interests of the people of this province but for the American market and to serve the interests of the United States energy strategy. It's time that they refocus their attention on the people that elected them, the people of this province who built this province. It's time that this government provided meaningful support to working and middle-class families in this province, Mr. Speaker, but this government is running out of time.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

**Rev. Abbott:** Oh, yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I'm just wondering if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood would give us some cost estimate of some of the proposals that he's made in his speech. He talked about, of course, eliminating health care premiums, a billion dollars, and talked about investing several billion dollars in infrastructure. I'm just wondering if he could be a little more specific in those numbers and some of the other programs that he's talked about. If he could just let us know some of the cost that he's talking about and where he proposes to get that money, that would be great.



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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond to the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and just indicate that the budget, in our view, places far too much emphasis on getting out of the mess that the government itself has created.

3:00

Let us not forget that the government itself has talked about eliminating health care premiums. To listen to the Conservative leadership hopefuls in their debates, you would think you were having a convention of the Alberta Liberal party. You know, they wanted to spend money on all kinds of different projects and give tax cuts at the same time. But let's be clear, Mr. Speaker, that in fact it was a number of leadership contenders for the Conservative Party that promised the elimination of health care premiums. Not perhaps the individual that the hon. member supported – I understand that he was the lone caucus member supporting the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who I'm sure didn't promise that – but there were so many Conservative leadership contenders . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** This is supposed to be brief comments and questions. Any others? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's interesting that the hon. member has chosen to dodge the question, one of the very things that he accuses us of during question period. I'm going to ask him once again, please. Could you please tell us the cost of your proposals in your speech?

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, it's a question of priorities. I know that the hon. member is very concerned about the cost, so he might be interested to know that there has been over \$100 million allocated by this government in budgets to the support of the horse-racing industry in the last few years. That's a number that he might be very interested in because, of course, in the NDP we're far more interested in reallocating money like that to actually help people who are, for example, on disability, seniors who are in inadequate or unsafe care.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There are lots of priorities for that money other than the rich horsemen and -women that, of course, support the Conservative Party and receive tremendous subsidization from the taxpayers, the ordinary people that that hon. member represents who pay their hard-earned money in taxes and then it gets spent on rich ranchers, to help them, I guess.

Mr. Speaker, those are the people that the Alberta New Democrats represent. They need to know that when they work hard and that money gets taken off their cheque every week by this provincial government, it's put toward some real priorities that make a difference for working families. There's not enough child care in this province. Rents are going through the roof. Utilities are too high. You know, when is the government going to wake up and start dealing with real priorities instead of taking taxpayers' money to subsidize rich horse breeders and the horse-racing industry? I'm sorry, but a New Democratic Party government would not have those kinds of wrong-headed priorities that seem to be supported by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others on Standing Order 29(2)(a)? If not, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to rise and to address the budget that we received approximately two weeks ago. I rise to speak to that budget, and I must say that many true conservatives are very disappointed in that budget, as I am. This budget is not fiscally good for the family or for the communities that we live in. It has presented a hardship to them.

This budget is a feeble effort or perhaps a desperate attempt to buy back votes that this government has lost. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that those votes didn't leave to go to the Liberal Party. They didn't go and vote for them. They're trying now to fight and to see who can spend the most money, and that's a blatant problem with democracy where they're trying to buy votes out of the public purse.

Mr. Speaker, the price of poor planning is what this budget is about. I would say that that is the true P3 of this Tory government: the price of poor planning. To make matters worse, they feel that the only way they can retain loyalty is to increase the conditions upon which that money that they're giving out is met. It's been universal with every municipal leader that I've talked to that they say that the new conditions for this municipal funding are unacceptable. To the previous minister of municipal affairs, who travelled around and spoke with the different mayors and Reeves, that was the number one message that they sent to him, that we need unconditional funding, and that has not been met.

Just to go over a few of the problems, I guess. We have a Tory government here that is bragging that they're spending six times more than other jurisdictions. This sounds like two princes that are out partying on the town to see who has the most money and the biggest budget to blow. The really sad thing, Mr. Speaker, on this is the fact that the town doesn't have the capacity to absorb that money, and we can use it specifically in the infrastructure position there. There are billions and billions of dollars that are being handed out and said: spend it now, spend it on this area, and do it before this time limit.

It puts us in a position that we can't accomplish it. To give a simple analogy, we could say that perhaps there is the capacity – and I know that this government knows the capacity – of 2,000 kilometres of paving to do a year, yet they hand the money out to these municipal governments and say: here, do 3,000. Then, when they put it up for tender, those people know that they can't all meet those tenders, so inflation goes up, and it's a direct result of the supply/demand shortage. Inflation is going rampant in the problem, and we're not getting good value for our dollar.

The Alberta Alliance has been proposing and will continue to propose that this funding must go to the municipalities and allow them to have a capital savings plan and say: "You use it when it's in your best interest. Perhaps, you're in an emergency situation, and you need to spend it now. You decide. But if you know you have the money in the bank, maybe you can go through some operating improvements, move it out three years for when you need to do that complete retrofit." But because the conditions are such that they have to spend it now and they don't have capital savings accounts, we're putting ourselves in a terrible situation. Inflation continues to go up, and we're getting less for the dollars that were spent. This is not in the interest of the families and the communities they live in, Mr. Speaker.

This government is very much addicted to spending. I want to quote the Finance minister. He says, "We must never return to the shortfall scenarios that plagued Alberta in the past." We all realize and know how critical that is, yet we've raised the stakes. We've raised the spending because they also quote that we live in the most

volatile of provinces to gauge what our income is. I always appreciate that they want to lowball the price of oil so that we are on the safe side. That's good fiscal planning. It's prudent. It's what we should do. But when we continue to raise the spending to that income and say, "Well, we still have some breathing room here," it isn't sustainable. We can't go on.

The last three budgets have all been: this is one-time spending. That's what the addict says when they go out. They're addicted to the oil and gas revenue. They're addicted to the gambling revenue. How many times have we listened to this government declare that we live in a volatile revenue province? Yet our budget is the largest ever, and our surplus is the smallest in the last three years. Yes, we have eliminated the balance at the bank, which is a great move. They've talked many times about the importance of not having to spend the interest money. That's to our benefit, yet we run out.

There have been many times that many people have spoken of a minimum 10-year infrastructure plan, Mr. Speaker. What they need to do – and the problem with this new municipal funding is that they say: this is going to be a 10-year program. I've talked to different municipal leaders, and the problem is that there is no formula, there is no way of calculating. Is Calgary going to get \$1.4 million for this project for the next 10 years? Is Taber going to get \$600,000 for the next years? Is Fort McMurray going to get this much for the next 10 years? The answer is: we don't know, they don't know, and the government won't tell us. You can't plan 10 years . . .

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Because they don't know.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, they don't want to commit. It's very easy to say: well, I'll wait and spend where I want to.

But, Mr. Speaker, if we want value for our money, if we want the road construction crews, if we want the housing crews, if we want all those to be there, we need to have a 10-year plan that says: this is what we're going to do. It can be conservative, it can be fiscally responsible, but we absolutely need to make sure that it's long term. If this plan is 10 years, each year you renew that so it's still 10 years and not run to the end with people wondering: well, now how is it going to be adjusted? We just don't know. It isn't good enough.

We need the long-term planning, and we need the formula so they know what it is that they're going to get and not wonder: well, is Taber going to get this money for the next 10 years, or is it two years and then they're going to change one of the requirements and we fall out of favour and then we can't pay for our waste water treatment plant? They don't know if they can borrow or go ahead, and then we get in the worse situation of things falling apart.

**3:10**

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go back for a minute. I'm very proud to put on the green ribbon today. What disturbs me, though, is that it says on here: "this is an opportunity to acknowledge the shortage of organs and tissues for transplantation." I don't know that there is a shortage. What there is is a lack of knowledge of people to realize the importance of using our resources wisely. I signed the back of my health care card many years ago. I've talked to my family. They all know that. That was looking forward. We can't have the intent and then after we die our family looking at that and wondering: oh, what do we do?

This is the same problem. I don't think that we have a shortage of money. What we have is a shortage of forethought to say: this is what we need to do responsibly. In 2003 the infrastructure money was drastically cut, and those construction companies that were addressing that, they sold their equipment; they left the province because of the huge cut. Now we've got this huge demand, and the cost has gone through the roof. We need a long, steady slope to

know that this is what the government is going to spend over the next 10 years. More important, they need those projects mapped out so that they can look, and they will bid accordingly and say, "Well, gosh, we should get this equipment; we should look at that and start to expand," because they know what's there. The further we can see down the future, Mr. Speaker, the better we are.

Mr. Speaker, another area that I want to address is the fact that this government is continuing to grow at an unprecedented rate. The Official Opposition has mentioned it, the third opposition, and the Alliance will mention it again. We need to eliminate the health care premiums. This is an ideal time. It's the proper time for proper tax reform. There will never be a better time, I believe, than the present time to look at and realize that now we can and, I guess, should clarify, reduce, simplify the taxes. One of the great things that we've done is that we've gone to a flat tax here in the province. That's a benefit to the people in the province. It's a great example to the rest of the country. Why, though, do we still have health care premiums? It isn't a good tax. It's government regulation. It's government bureaucracy. What we can do is reduce the size of government plus reduce our taxes: two things, easy to do. We need to accomplish that.

We also need to realize that there's a shortage of labour, Mr. Speaker, out there in our province. True prosperity is often measured by the number of people working in private versus those civil servants. The ratios continue to be skewed and not in our favour for prosperity. We need to be looking at a program of attrition and realizing that as we start to cut down now, to give incentives for people to get out into the private sector and take those jobs would be a benefit for us.

Mr. Speaker, now is the time to reclaim provincial responsibility and jurisdictions. Federal programs have not and will not work for western Canada. They're skewed to the east. We understand why they do that, so why should we continue to sign on to these programs, everything from equalization to immigration to the Canada pension plan? Now is the time to give notice and to give proper understanding to the people of Alberta that we can and will do better by running provincial programs. We don't need to be part of the federal ones.

We definitely need to minimize the size of government. I'll repeat it: our economic strength depends on the number of people engaged in productive work against the number of civil servants.

Mr. Speaker, there are many areas that we can and should be addressing in our budget that we have failed to. I want to speak for a minute on those that are the less privileged in the province. We have set the example. Our basic tax exemption is almost \$15,000. But the fact of the matter is that with our heated economy people still can't make ends meet. There's no reason why we don't raise our basic tax exemption to \$20,000.

We need to enhance our education system. We're talking about those that are having trouble with academics, and those are the ones that we're losing the most. We need to take the career and technology training back to where it has been in history, and that's to a younger age. Young men and women are very engaged and active in wanting to learn and to try and explore new things. There's no reason why we don't have industrial arts in grade 7 going through grade 12 and letting these kids try things because the neat thing is that the human being has the capacity, Mr. Speaker, to be both – what would I say? – technologically capable as well as academic. Yet we're dividing it and saying, "Well, you can't do those things," when a well-rounded individual and to get into the arts and the music and have all of those career opportunities available in a curriculum in their school would benefit Albertans more than anything else.

We have to reach out, especially to those less privileged, and let them realize that they have other talents. They might not excel with the books, with the studying, but maybe they're a great artist. Maybe they're a great welder. Maybe they, you know, understand electricity. We need to let them have those opportunities and excel and come and be part of the great workforce.

Mr. Speaker, health care is another huge issue that we're definitely struggling with, and we need to have choice here in the province. This is supposed to be the free world. Why would we have someone that I talked to – this is recently – who flew to England, spent \$66,000 to get two Birmingham hips, and we lose that money? I think we can bring them into this country.

Our former Premier: one of the great things he was concerned about was the money that was leaving the province to go gambling, so he brought gambling to the province. We have money leaving to go buy health care and the things that they need when we should be allowing that to be set up here. It doesn't attack the public system; it benefits it, and we need to allow that to come in. We need to change our attitude and have the funding following the patients. It would increase the productivity of the different doctors. I've talked to many specialists. They're limited in how much they're allowed to do. Thus, we have the waiting lines.

Perhaps the most innovative thing that we've done in the past was how we tackled the oil sands, Mr. Speaker. How we did that was with tax incentives and concessions that made something economically viable because we removed the burden of government and the taxes that are there. What we need to do is look at that with health care. We need to look at it with education. We really need to look at it with charitable organizations. They've taken a step in the right direction, but what we really need to do is to look at and take charitable donations like we do an RRSP. We've converted to RRSPs because the government can't finance our retirement funding. We can't finance all of the social programs we need, so we need a tax deduction to give to those charitable organizations, whether it's art for teenage recovery or whatever. We need to have those.

Mr. Speaker, there are many areas. I see that I'm running out of time, so in conclusion I just want to say that we need a government that is fiscally responsible, one that has the discipline to save in good times and tough times, to live within our means.

Alberta needs to take leadership with tax reform. We need to put in place strong incentives to save and invest, lead by example, Mr. Speaker. We need to have a major shift or reform in taxes. We need to put our house in order and then go to the federal government and urge them with all of our power and persuasion to have tax reform that will really, truly help our families and our communities. We're overtaxed. We can't make ends meet, and we need to have tax concessions. We need to have that funding going to our communities in unconditional funding so they can and they will meet the needs and not have central government with central planning that has the strings attached. It's not in our best interest.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, a question and comment period is available under Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner could enlighten us a little bit, in view of his views on the necessity for good fiscal planning and discipline in spending, what particular departments he would suggest are exceeding the amount of money that they ought to be receiving.

Also, in regard to his advocacy of a 10-year plan instead of a three-year business plan, as is presently contemplated, I believe it's

a great idea in theory, but does he know what the prices of oil and gas are going to be in five or eight or 10 years down the road? Does he know how many people are going to be immigrating into our province five or eight or 10 years down the road? And if the hon. member was going to lowball the figures on the prices of oil and gas, would he advocate that we postpone any of the necessary infrastructure and capital spending that we have to do and perhaps postpone the fire hall that he needs in his riding of Cardston-Taber-Warner or some other capital projects that are direly needed by Alberta in view of the rapid economic growth and the rapid increase in our population, over 100,000 people in the past year? So what would he suggest in response to those issues?

3:20

**Mr. Hinman:** I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for asking those. They're all valid and excellent questions. I guess that my first response would be: if we think that government is the solution to our problems, we're wrong. Government is usually the problem, and we need to find outside solutions.

To start with, there's no reason why you can't put your priorities in order. If you're running any business, you know the lifespan of that equipment. We know the lifespan of the roads. We know the bridges, and with good economic budgeting we'll say: this is how much we need and should go forward on. But the important thing that I guess I would want to stress – and yes, we don't know our oil and gas revenues, and that's why I go back. Human nature is and the universe is that we fill any void.

It's important to realize that just because we have the money doesn't mean that we have to spend it. Especially to put that on, to say: "You know what? You have to spend this today." It might be 11 o'clock at night. So rather than wait for the morning to go buy your groceries at a good store, you've got to go to 7-Eleven. That's the condition that this government has put in. It's too late in the day. It's way too long. It's on the weekend, yet here's the money, and you have to have it before it's over, and it needs to be long term. It hasn't been there. I don't see it changing to be there in the future. So that's a detriment, and we don't get good value for our money.

The construction crews. I've talked to many of them, and their attitude is: we're going to put a bid in to pay for our equipment in this one project because we don't know when the next one's coming down the road. That's very poor planning on our part.

Probably the most important thing, though, let's talk social services: we spend a lot of money, but it's not effective money. If we were to take the same attitude that we do with our RRSPs, realizing, "You know what? We don't have the ability to meet the cost of these people that are retiring, so what we'll do is we'll let them take their money – we won't tax them on it – and save for themselves," that's been a huge incentive, and Canadians have grasped onto that and grabbed it.

Think what would happen if we took that same incentive and said: "You know what? Down in Taber they have a youth centre. They have a women's shelter. They have those things," and if we were to say, "You know what? If you donate directly to a charitable organization or service group in your community, we'll take that off your income. Instead of \$55,000, if you donate \$5,000 to them, it's only going to be \$50,000." We would probably quadruple – some people say tenfold – the bang for our buck if we gave it personally directly to a charitable organization because one of the neat things is that, first, they're very fiscally responsible. The other, more important thing is: most of the people that are running those are true volunteers that are giving of their time. We could address the social issues in a huge way.

If we were to take industry and tell them – and let's take the same thing with the health care. Ten billion dollars a year we spend on

health care, and we say that we don't have the money to buy the equipment or the facilities. How are we going to do that? If we were to take the same attitude with health care and say: "You know what, doctors and specialists? If you want to take, let's say, up to 20 per cent of your income and purchase equipment with it, we will not tax you on that. You can buy it first." That money, then, would go directly to that, and it would spur the economy, and it would get things going.

Ask another question. I'd love to finish answering.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon in response to the budget speech that was delivered in this Assembly on the 19th of April. This afternoon the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition delivered a rather eloquent speech in terms of the response. [interjections] I'm glad the members opposite enjoyed the speech from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition leader as much as I did.

Mr. Speaker, I'm here to more or less bat cleanup for the Leader of the Official Opposition. He touched on a number of very important broad points, and I would like to just go back to some of those and talk about some of the specifics that we feel are lacking in the document that was presented to the House by the Finance minister.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview referred to the fact that there is no serious commitment to savings in this budget, and that causes a great deal of concern. Indeed, there's been a fair amount of discussion about that this afternoon. I suppose we have to credit the Finance minister a little bit. There is a surplus savings component to the budget. Although it's four years behind the Official Opposition and our surplus plan, that we rolled out in advance of the 2004 election, it is there, and I suppose it's better than nothing. But it is really only a very small baby step in terms of where we really have to take this province.

One of the reasons why the Official Opposition converted our surplus policy into a resource revenue savings policy is because of the clear indication from this government over a period of years that surpluses are subject to political manoeuvring and machination. So there was a recognition on our side that in order to protect Albertans, who, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar always says, own the resource, in order to protect us as citizens of this province from political manoeuvring, it's important to amend that surplus policy into a savings policy so that regardless of the whim of the government of the day the commitment to savings will remain strong and will accomplish all of the things that the Leader of the Official Opposition outlined in his speech earlier.

Obviously, we're very, very disappointed in that, and I guess my only hope is in knowing that over the last 12 years this government has underestimated surpluses to the tune of some \$30 billion, an average of about \$3 billion a year. There is maybe some hope that, you know, their underestimation will be at least as drastic this year and that there may actually be some money surplus to the budget that would go into the heritage savings trust fund, but I suppose we'll have to wait and see.

I'm incredibly distressed over the fact that this Finance minister has yet to put an end to the practice of raping the profits realized by the heritage savings trust fund and dumping those into general revenue. I've been saying for nearly three years now that this is a practice that has to end. In a time of incredible economic boom, when we're realizing profits beyond anybody's wildest dream, the fact that we continue to take net revenue out of the heritage savings

trust fund and put it into general revenue is unacceptable. Everywhere I go across this province, people tell me that. This government has to hear that message, so it's being repeated by myself today.

The other thing that causes me a great deal of concern is that despite the fact that they trumpet that the fund has finally been inflation-proofed, their own budget documents reveal that, in fact, the fund is not inflation-proofed. The only commitment to inflation-proofing the heritage savings trust fund is if, in fact, we realize the approximate \$2 billion budgeted surplus, but if for some reason something should happen where we don't realize the budgeted surplus, we don't even inflation-proof the heritage savings trust fund. So what is that all about?

**Ms Haley:** Yes we do.

**Mr. R. Miller:** No, we do not. Read the documents. The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is telling me that we do, but in fact she's wrong. The documents are quite clear that we only inflation-proof the heritage savings trust fund if, in fact, we meet that budget surplus. If I'm wrong, I would ask the hon. member to show me where I'm wrong because I would feel much better if, in fact, I am wrong, but I don't believe I am.

Mr. Speaker, it's been discussed, in fact during question period today, the total failure by this government to address the unfunded teachers' pension liability. Despite a one-line commitment in the budget document there's no firm commitment in money other than the \$25 million slap in the face that teachers have received with a very drastic warning as to the fact that they'd better, you know, play nice in the sandbox or else the minister is going to pull that money away from them too. All we've really done here is (a) pit experienced teachers against new teachers. I've heard this from teachers across the province over the last couple of weeks. It's the old divide and conquer tactics that we've seen from this government so many times. It continues today. Even though the chairs have been rearranged on the front bench and we have some different faces, the tactics are the same as they always have been.

3:30

Once again, Mr. Speaker, we've managed to put the school boards in the crosshairs between the government and the teachers of this province. I've heard from many school board trustees and administrators over the last couple of weeks who are incredibly concerned about the fact that they've only been given a 3.3 per cent increase in their budget despite the fact that everybody knows that inflation is running at approximately 5 per cent in this province, so automatically they're faced with making cuts before they even sit down to begin their budgeting process. And, as I say, now they're in the unenviable situation of having a whole bunch of teachers very, very angry at the way that they're being treated by this government when it comes to the unfunded liability. They're the ones that are going to have to deal with that when it comes to the negotiations in the fall.

This is an incredible lack of vision in my mind. In fact, I had floated the idea in this Assembly some time ago that with all of the money that we have in short-term savings right now, whether it be in the capital account or in the sustainability account, and with the obvious overheated construction industry, it might be time to take some of that money – I don't know how much – and, if the minister wanted to make a real show of good faith to the teachers, apply that against the unfunded liability right now. That's a good deal for teachers. It would make them all happy, not just some of them.

It would be a good deal for Alberta taxpayers. If we want to talk about fiscal responsibility, let's do something today to address the

billions and billions of dollars that this is going to cost Alberta taxpayers over the next 53 years. You know, that's a no-brainer. I'm really, frankly, quite disappointed that this government didn't see their way to make that commitment.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately there's no real commitment in this budget to public transit systems. Today's announcement of the cancellation and indefinite hold on the expansion of the light rail transit system in Calgary is just one example of that. A number of speakers have mentioned the fact that the large urban centres in this province need that money to come to them unfettered so that they can make the decisions as to how best to use it, and that, as we know, did not happen.

There's been no firm commitment, at least not in the budget documents, to a high-speed rail connection between Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary. I applaud the minister responsible for his announcement last week, when we learned that some land has been purchased in downtown Calgary for a possible future station for a high-speed train. The minister knows that this is a project that I'm passionate about, and I think it's time that we at the very least made a firm commitment to acquiring right-of-way not just in the two major centres of Edmonton and Calgary but, certainly, a greenfield right-of-way between Edmonton and Calgary to secure the land for future high-speed transit. As I say, I applaud the minister for making that step, but it doesn't appear as a firm commitment in the budget, and we really need that. We need to know that we're going to take firm, positive action to secure that right-of-way and soon, before it gets chewed up by the incredible growth and expansion that's taking place.

Although Alberta's population may not warrant it today, this is a system such that some day I could envision, you know, maybe 50 years down the road, this train going to Fort McMurray. It could go to Grande Prairie and the Peace region. It could go to Medicine Hat and down to Lethbridge. I mean, this is the way of the future. We're talking incredible benefits in terms of the environment, in terms of the health care system, in terms of infrastructure, and it goes on and on and on. I would strongly encourage all members to have a serious look at the Van Horne Institute report from 2005, if they're not familiar with it, to see just what the benefits of a high-speed train are.

Something else has caused me a great deal of concern out of this budget. Again, a little bit of a nod to the government, and then I'll express my disappointment. For the first time in the years that I've been in this Legislature, there is no move to increase the \$5.3 billion restriction on the use of nonrenewable resource revenue in the budget, so it's capped at \$5.3 billion. You'll remember, Mr. Speaker, that when I first came into this Assembly, it was at \$3.5 billion. So in two and a half years we've nearly doubled the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that the government uses, but at least this year it didn't go up. However, there is a notation in the budget documents that I did not see before, and I'm going to quote directly from page 12 of the fiscal framework, where it says that "an average of over \$2 billion a year in non-renewable resource revenue will be allocated to the Capital Account to fund capital projects in each of the next three years." So despite the fact that there is a nice bubble on that page that says there's no change to the \$5.3 billion limit on the use of resource revenue, there's this other little notation in small print that talks about, oh, by the way, we are actually allowed to use another \$2 billion. So instead of \$5.3 billion it is, in fact, \$7.3 billion, and I think that's an important note that people should be aware of.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to comment on the fact that there has been no commitment by this government – clearly no commitment by this government – to tie budget increases either for

this year or for future years to the rate of growth in population and/or the rate of growth in inflation, and this is something that is represented in the Official Opposition's document, which I think most members would be familiar with now, entitled *Funding Alberta's Future*. Several advocacy groups, most of the chambers of commerce that I'm aware of, certainly the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, all of whom would be considered to be to the right of the political spectrum in terms of their fiscal policy, at least: all of these groups have agreed with the Official Opposition in terms of calling for the need to tie budget increases to inflation and population growth, and this is something that is in our policy.

Something that I think is important to note is that whenever policy discussion takes place in our caucus, any policy changes that are approved by our caucus must fall within that framework, must fall within that template. So although I hear a lot of members opposite talking about, you know, "you guys are never happy," and "all you want is to spend more money," they should be aware of the fact that we don't approve any policies unless they can fall within those guidelines. That's something that we do as a Liberal opposition, something that this so-called Conservative government does not do, and I think it's an important notation.

We're certainly not the only ones who've noticed that they don't do it. As I say, many business and taxpayers' rights groups as well as average citizens on the street have noticed this. I think the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner pointed out in his comments that year after year we hear the government saying: "This is a one-time thing. Don't expect it next year." Then we get to the next year's budget, and they do it again. Then we get to the next year's budget, and they do it again, even more.

This year we see record spending from the government, and they've managed to upset almost everybody. It's almost inconceivable that you could spend 17 per cent more than you did last year, and everybody is mad at you. It just shows how clearly out of touch they are with what the people of this province are expecting from their government. It shows how clearly out of touch they are when they announce spending like that, and they're not making anybody happy.

**Ms Blakeman:** There are no new ideas there.

**Mr. R. Miller:** My colleague from Edmonton-Centre is saying that there are no new ideas there, and I think, really, that is sort of the crux of the matter. We've got a government that has announced record spending, but there is no real vision for the future. As the Official Opposition Leader described it, it's a reactionary budget. They're racing around trying to put out political fires, but there's no grand plan for the future of this province, and that's what people are really looking for. They've heard over the last two years the same as I've heard. That's why they had a leadership race and chose a new leader. Their own membership was telling them: we need a plan.

What we've seen here now is a government that's been in place for six months, prepared their first budget, and once again – and no surprise to this member – there's no plan. There's no real big-picture vision for the future, and that is a shame.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a couple of inquiries for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. He

advocated more spending for cities for transportation, more money for acquiring right-of-way for the high-speed rail between Calgary and Edmonton, and he's advocated more money for the unfunded liability for the teachers' pension plan, yet he is espousing a program which purports to tie the increases in spending to the sum of the inflation and population increase, as I understood it.

3:40

I wonder if he could enlighten us as to what substantial cuts he would make to the budget as announced? What spending programs as announced in this budget would he cut in order to come within those guidelines yet add the additional spending that he has got, given the fact that we were at approximately a 10 per cent increase in the operating funding in this budget? If you include capital infrastructure, it's somewhat higher, around 17 per cent, I believe.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to address some of those questions. First of all, the real thing with municipalities – and the member has heard it from his own mayor today and over the previous number of days – is a need to give them that money without tying strings to it. Live up to the promises that were made by the Premier during the election campaign. Live up to the promises that were made by the Premier during prebudget consultations with the cities. That's all that we're asking. That's all that the municipalities are asking.

In terms of the unfunded liability I mentioned this large pot of money that's sitting in the sustainability account, which wasn't really dealt with by the government in terms of how they're going to use that. My fear, quite frankly, is that it's sitting there as an election slush fund and that we may see all sorts of announcements coming over the next year as we move closer to an election.

As far as the high-speed transit we've discussed this in this Legislature. Last year there was a motion from the Official Opposition which, I'll point out, was turned down by the government. All we asked in that motion was that the government consider building a high-speed electric transit line between Edmonton and Calgary. There were all sorts of reasons why they wouldn't support it, but the one thing they did support during that debate – and you can go back and check *Hansard* . . . [interjections] If the hon. members across would just listen to me for one second, the one thing that they did support, that every speaker supported was the idea of securing the right-of-way. In the Van Horne report in 2005 it was only \$47 million. Now, I would suggest to the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill that that is less money than we spend on horse racing in a year. It's less money than we'll give to the horse-racing industry.

So, you know, it's a matter of priorities. Quite frankly, that's really what it comes down to. What do you want to do? Do you want to move people, or do you want to build racetracks? You know, it's very simple. The money is there. It's really a question of how you decide to use it.

The last question is really one of sustainability, Mr. Speaker. You know, the hon. Leader of the Opposition talked this afternoon about the sustainability gap. We know that last year nonrenewable resource revenues supported this government to the tune of about \$2,300 per man, woman, and child. That cannot continue. This year, with the budget that we've seen from them, we know that that sustainability gap is going to be even bigger. What that means is that the money that we're taking in from sustainable, renewable resources, whether it be gambling or whether it be income taxes or whether it be service fees or transfers from the federal government, is not keeping up to government spending. Every year we're using

more and more oil and gas revenues to maintain this government. That's not sustainable. That's what these guys have to wake up to.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, and this is probably the most important thing to note, the reasons why these guys say they can't do it – “We're in danger of going into deficits” or “What if oil goes to \$4 a barrel?”, all of the things that the Premier has trotted out – are exactly the reasons why we have to adopt the plan for funding Alberta's future. Those are exactly the reasons. If you don't do that today, you guys are going to be in one heck of a mess a year or two down the road. Everybody can see it coming. It's a train wreck waiting to happen. I just can't believe that you guys turn blind eyes to it.

I mean, you cannot continue to do this. The minister in his own press release says: don't expect this next year; we have to find a way to control this. Well, you're right. You have to find a way to control it, and we gave you the answer. The answer is: start saving today. Don't say: maybe we'll save one-third of it if there's extra money at the end of the year. Say: no, we're going to tighten our belts; we're going to take a third of all of that revenue right now and put it in the bank. That's how you do it.

If you do that every year, year after year, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill would find that – you know what? – by the year 2020 you've actually got more money coming in from your heritage savings trust fund than you do for oil and gas, and the next thing you know, you're not dependent on oil and gas anymore. That's what it's all about.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The time for Standing Order 29(2)(a) has elapsed.

I recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Ms Haley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise today and just speak a little bit in general about the budget. I wanted to make sure that I was living in the same Alberta as the members across the way because after listening for over an hour now, I feel like there's nothing good anywhere in this province, yet I happen to know that that can't possibly be true. I, too, have constituents, almost 60,000 of them, more than the average constituency in the province. People are moving into my constituency. They're moving out from Calgary. They're moving down from Edmonton. They're moving in from other provinces. They're moving in from around the world, and they're really happy to be here. So I have to wonder why there's happiness there when, apparently, there's not much in other parts of the province.

**Ms Blakeman:** It's all you, Carol.

**Ms Haley:** It is all me, you know. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the things that are in the budget. For example, Mr. Speaker, operating spending is increasing by 10 per cent. That is in large part because of the inflation rate and the population growth of 3 per cent, which outstrips every other province in Canada by at least two-thirds. Our inflation is higher here. Problematic. I believe it's a temporary issue, but it is something that we're all going to have to deal with. You would have needed a 7 per cent increase in operating spending just to break even, before the organizations that we fund have to do cutbacks. They were given an additional amount of 3 per cent to try and deal with their own cost pressures.

We all know that everybody is coming up for renegotiation of contracts, whether it's teachers or nurses. The doctors have just

completed theirs. The health science workers will be working on new contracts this year as well. We hope that with the increases that we gave people, they would be able to manage not only the wage increase pressures this year but also the inflation that's occurring even today as we speak.

Health and Wellness is something that does concern me. It went up by 10.1 per cent, to \$10.8 billion, yet it doesn't seem to be enough. I do believe that it's time to take a very close look at Health and Wellness spending to determine: is the money being allocated in the right way by the regional health authorities? Are we allocating it to them in the proper way? Should more money be going to long-term care or wellness rather than acute care? I think that those are really important questions.

I think the electronic health record, which everybody agrees is an important and necessary step – I also happen to believe that it's slightly problematic in what it costs. I hope that we get a billion dollars' worth of services out of it in short order because that's probably what we've spent to date. It isn't complete yet, Mr. Speaker, and I worry about that. I think everybody should be concerned if that's the appropriate place for us to be allocating money, even though we all know intuitively that it's an important addition to the health care system.

Advanced Education and Technology grew by over 10 per cent, to \$2.3 billion this year, also a very large increase but in part because of the capital plan that has been adding spaces to these institutions. If you're going to add spaces to these institutions, you also have to pay the additional costs for more students to be able to go there. So, you know, we can complain about the rise being more than inflation plus population, but we also have to look at the realities of the situation.

Education went up by 5.5 per cent. We are spending more per capita as well as per student than any place in Canada on education.

I would hope that inside all of that spending that the teachers and the pension issue can also be dealt with. We are part signatories to an agreement with the Alberta Teachers' Association that was brought through this Legislature in 1992 which gave two-thirds of the unfunded pension liability responsibility to the province of Alberta, that is taxpayers, not just government – don't forget that government is just the people – and one-third of that responsibility to the teachers. So when that agreement was ratified – ratified – by the teachers, it was also ratified in this House. There is an existing commitment on both sides, so if any changes are going to be done to that, I would sincerely hope that it be done through a negotiated process because as a taxpayer I'm not necessarily willing to take on that extra one-third problem of \$2.2 billion that somehow I would have to owe money on. I don't accept that. So I think that that's a bigger issue, Mr. Speaker, and one that needs to be talked about more fully.

The capital plan, which everybody knows is huge – there have been many comments made on it already. We can try and address inside there what the issues are that we're spending that money on. We can start on some of the things that have been done.

We have completed the southwest leg of Edmonton's Anthony Henday road, which was just completed in 2006. I know, judging by the people who are using it, that they appreciate very much the less congestion for the traffic here in Edmonton.

In Calgary we're still working on the northeast leg of the Stoney Trail ring road. Part of that will be just bordering my constituency, Mr. Speaker, around the northeast edge of the city of Calgary, and I know that we're all looking forward to 2009, when that part opens up, because we've been living with a traffic nightmare for the last five or six years. But, then, we've had higher growth rates down

south, more consistent than had been occurring in the Edmonton area prior to this last couple of years.

3:50

We negotiated Alberta's second public/private partnership on construction for that, and I do have to say that the one that was negotiated for Edmonton worked very well, Mr. Speaker. We were able to book a solid price. The project came in on budget, which is one of the only ones in the capital plan that has done that. Also, before it was actually due, it was completed.

We've also been able to twin several segments of the north-south trade corridor, which are very important to the exports because our province is an exporting province.

We implemented the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, providing \$3 billion of financial assistance, and that was before we'd been working on this \$1.4 billion, which over the next three years will see an additional \$1.4 billion going to municipalities.

I am sorry that the mayor of Calgary feels that somehow there's something wrong in his world, but Calgary has benefited from the original \$3 billion plan by a billion dollars. That's a billion dollars that Saskatoon or Regina or any city in Manitoba or Ontario or Quebec hasn't seen anything like, neither has British Columbia. So to have him say that he's had to put projects on hold I find ironic because he's already had the benefit of not only getting the GST back from the federal government, he's also got 5 cents per litre of every litre of gasoline sold in the city of Calgary. He's got a billion dollars over five years from the original program plus additional money from the new program that's just being implemented now. So if he doesn't want to build them, I think that there are probably reasons other than, wow, somebody attached a string to something, but I guess that's his call.

We paved 918 kilometres of provincial highways in 2006 and opened a state-of-the-art level 3 biocontaminant lab, putting Alberta on the cutting edge of animal disease detection and research. We opened the new Alberta Children's hospital. Very few provinces can say anything like that. We completed the National Institute for Nanotechnology at the University of Alberta.

We commenced construction on the University of Alberta Centennial Centre for Interdisciplinary Science, selected a site for the new \$308 million Edmonton Remand Centre, funded the University of Calgary's Child Development Centre, ongoing redevelopment of hospitals in Lethbridge, Rimbey, Edson, Barrhead, Viking, and High Prairie, committed to upgrade the greenhouse facilities for a crop diversification centre in Brooks, opened 15 new schools, purchased 130 new steel-framed modular classrooms, and provided \$413 million for the acquisition of medical and diagnostic equipment.

You know, it's not all doom and gloom here. Somewhere in all of that there must have been something that made someone happy.

The increase for community facilities included one-time funding of \$280 million over two years for the new major community facilities program to provide grants supporting community public-use facilities like skating rinks, swimming pools, curling rinks, things that people in Alberta totally enjoy and use on a massive basis. I know that my communities will be very happy to hear that that program is available.

We have an expansion and a renewal of the Royal Alberta Museum, funding to a maximum of \$69 million to help the Canada Olympic Development Association on their renewal project, grants totalling \$80 million to the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, Northlands here in Edmonton, the Pengrowth Saddledome, Rexall Place, MacMahon Stadium, and Commonwealth Stadium. So somebody in Edmonton and Calgary must be kind of happy about that, I'm hoping.

Ongoing funding for maintenance and upgrades to provincial parks, museums, and historical sites, which is something that Albertans truly love and use. So maybe a little bit of happiness there.

I also wanted to mention that here in Alberta there were over 57,000 net migrants into our province from other provinces, so they must see something worth coming for. We created over 86,000 jobs in the province last year. Our housing starts – and this one is interesting because while everybody complains about it, there were over 48,962 housing starts in the province of Alberta last year. That is not just a record for Alberta but a record in Canada. The nearest province to us, Ontario, which has, I believe, three times our population, maybe four, had 52,000 housing starts. That gives you an indication that the construction industry is working here. People are building houses to live in, to rent out. It's not just government building, you know, some houses. This is real. I'm sure half of them are being built in my riding.

**Mr. Knight:** Do we build unreal houses?

**Ms Haley:** Well, we could, maybe.

Retail sales in Alberta last year increased by 16.2 per cent. That's more than double the national increase of 6.4 per cent. So that's when it starts to get interesting for me. How can that happen in a province where apparently so many people are so incredibly devastated? I'm not understating the fact that there are people having difficulty with a paradigm shift that's occurring in Alberta on the value of housing and on rental prices. It isn't something that we've gone through for about 25 years, but we went through this in the late '70s and early '80s.

When housing and rent controls were brought in, they weren't just brought into Alberta. Pierre Elliott Trudeau was the Prime Minister of Canada. He ran an election, as I recall, based on no to rent and price controls and then immediately brought them in as soon as he got elected. That was a Liberal government, I think, Mr. Speaker. Anyway, the point is that for several years everything was frozen and absolutely nothing got built during that period of time. In order to finally get more construction going on, even the federal government had to admit that they had to start pulling back on that. So it is problematic. It is a market push.

I feel bad for the people that are caught in it. I, too, have sons. One of them is a renter; the other is just trying to buy a house. They, too, are dealing with these realities. I have an aging mother, who also has her own issues on a financial level. But there is a seniors' benefit package that does help my mom, and I'm her daughter, and if she needs help, I will help her too. So there is a family component to all of this. When a member of our family is having difficulty, maybe it's time for the rest of the family to step up a little bit too, not just government. The family unit is also a part of our mix in this province.

We have the lowest combined provincial and municipal tax burden amongst all the provinces. We are only at 57.5 per cent of the average. That means that we pay 43 per cent less in combined taxes here in Alberta than other provinces. So that, too, must help some of the people in our province that are on our lower level.

There are so many things I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, and I understand that my time is almost up, but I wanted to mention the inflation-proofing of the heritage savings trust fund that the hon. member across the way brought up. Inside the Fiscal Responsibility Act is an indication that when the debt was paid off, we must in fact immediately start inflation-proofing the heritage savings trust fund. That is the law, and we are doing it. We did it the first year when the debt was officially announced as being paid off, even though

money was set aside for the continued paydown of that debt. It was officially at that point considered paid off by our government. We have been inflation-proofing, and we will continue to do so.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's my Alberta. I think it's just a marvellous place to live. While we've got some issues, all of us, in dealing with inflation or the cost of construction projects going up, we will deal with it. We're Albertans, you know. That's what we do. I just want to say thank God I live here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Anybody? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do thank the hon. member for the enlightening discourse on the budget. I wonder whether she could perhaps elaborate on some of those other good-news statistics that are coming out of Alberta in view of the budget?

**Ms Haley:** I'd be happy to, Mr. Speaker. I think the most important thing is to note how incredibly productive Albertans are. We have the highest level of participation in the workforce of any province in Canada by a long way, not just a little way. We also have the most productive workforce in Canada. Our gross domestic product participation is about \$20,000 higher than the next closest province, which is also, again, phenomenal.

We have the lowest tax rates in Canada, the highest disposable spending, the highest weekly wages anywhere in the country. We also have, in my opinion – and somebody I'm sure will disagree with me – I believe, the best other programs for children's services, for our seniors. We have tried very hard to ensure that our seniors' benefit package goes to those people who truly need it, and that includes things like if your furnace goes out. Some of our more fragile seniors can apply to the government and get at least two-thirds if not a full cost recovery on a furnace or another addition, a piece for their house that helps keep them in their homes. So there is a reason that we have a net migration into our province of seniors from other provinces. It is because we do have good programs here. Our drug program is second to none. I think that you could go on and on, and I appreciate the opportunity to just add a little bit more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:00

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would appear that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere wasn't listening the day that I gave my response to the throne speech because the day that I gave my response to the throne speech I was quite careful to point out that government members seem to have on rose-coloured glasses: everything is just fine, and it's the greatest place in the world to live. And members from the ND tend to find nothing right with the way things are going, and everything is a problem. It's the Liberal opposition that is realistic. We don't have on rose-coloured glasses, but neither do we wear blinders to the reality that our constituents are dealing with day to day.

My question for the hon. member would be this. I have an entire apartment complex, about 80 to 100 units, about 200 individuals that were given eviction notices on Sunday. I'm meeting with them later this week. My challenge to you is: would you come with me and meet with those people and tell them what your government is going to do to help them find a place to live on August 31 when they no longer have a place to live? Are they supposed to move in with their



families, all 200 of them? Is that their families' responsibility? I'm telling you that it's time that this government did something today, not talk about what we're going to do over the next two years but today, to help those people that have been told they have to be out of their houses, and there's no place to go in this city. We're talking about .3 per cent vacancy. What are they supposed to do? I want you to come with me and tell them. My question for you is: will you come with me and tell them what your government is going to do to help them find a place to live on August 31? That's my question.

**Ms Haley:** You know, Mr. Speaker, it's a really interesting problem that he's got. He is the MLA for that area, and I expect him to take the information from municipal affairs and invite somebody from municipal affairs because we've just brought in a package to try and assist people. Can I help with their eviction notices? Probably not. What I can tell you is this. In my constituency we have issues too. One of them is that we're building houses so fast. There are so many people moving in. Perhaps you could understand that on the other side we need more construction, not less of it, and that by bringing in things like a rent control program, you limit the number of houses that people will build. Some of my landlords are upset too. They're wondering why they bother renting out houses at all. Their costs have gone up: their insurance costs, their utility costs, their construction costs. If they need to do renovations, those costs have gone up as well. They see this as a marketplace situation.

While I understand that it is stressful for some families – I really do – I don't think you should minimize my point, hon. member. As a mother and a daughter, when my family is in trouble, I am there for them. That was my point, and I don't think that you should make fun of that by implying that somehow nobody should help their own family. There are 200 families, and I feel badly for them, but I am also confident that they will have assistance in finding places to live. Like I said, Mr. Speaker, over 48,000 . . .

**Mr. R. Miller:** That's like the Energy minister saying that we should all put on a jacket and turn down the heat.

**Ms Haley:** Talk to the hand. It's the only thing listening to you.

Over 48,000 housing starts in Alberta last year. I am confident that we will probably exceed that this year.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on the debate.

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you. I'm pleased and honoured to rise in this House of democracy today to speak to the new budget for our great province of Alberta. It is interesting to rise and reply to this budget as one of the first speakers after the leaders of the various opposition parties. Now, the previous opposition speakers today deem it to be in their interest to expend all efforts to criticize every move and every innovation of the government. But sitting here, being an independent changes one's point of view. I like the view for now.

Why oppose for the sake of opposing? Why not give praise where praise is due? Why not work positively for the sake of one's constituents, for the sake of Albertans? Why not just do the right thing? Why not say the truth when one thinks something is good? And good ladies and gentlemen, members of this Assembly, I see this as a good budget.

Now, spending will never be enough for anyone in the area of their interest, and spending will always be too much when they are paying their taxes, and spending will never be fair when someone somewhere gets attention that they think should or could be coming their way. We must be careful about spending. Ten per cent is a lot.

The increases are necessary to deal with growth pressures. God knows I have been among the first to call for spending in certain areas, but we must be prudent in planning for growth, for next year, for what's going to be happening, for all the people that are coming, and for what we have to build.

The oil price – and I've talked to a number of economists on this – the bitumen price, and the natural gas price assumptions may be too high. Next year's surplus may not be so rosy. The level of increases are a good investment for today, but that level of increase cannot be sustained. We remember the '80s. We remember the '90s. You know, the Official Opposition are talking about spending on everything and anything, and from what I've seen in terms of any sort of balancing of the books or anything, they'd spend Alberta into the ground. But revenues should be good this year. We are in a boom in Alberta. There will be surpluses. In this budget significant surplus monies have been prudently targeted at maintenance and replacement requirements. This is a sound investment for government.

I'm very impressed by the tax initiatives, even though many Albertans, I daresay, especially the blue-collar folks and independent businesses, would like more tax breaks. I'll give special note to the charitable donations tax credit. This innovation is one that I've been supporting for some time. Now, it will go a long way to alleviating the increasing stress that many of our good works organizations are feeling. It will provide more coin to the areas where front-line people want resources to go. Remember that these agencies are often the ones that provide the best value and targeting for the helping dollar.

I also must note the fairness of annual indexing of income tax in this budget and how it prevents inflation creep of taxes. This is only fair and shows a commitment to honesty by this government. I do think that the small business tax threshold of \$430,000 is still far too low and should go far beyond what was announced in this budget. These smaller businesses have much higher risk yet give tremendously in Alberta and are truly the future of our economy.

Now I will relate a little illustrative story. One day while his son was away at school, a father decided to try an experiment. He went into the boy's room and placed on his desk three objects: a Bible, a \$20 bill, and a bottle of rye whisky. Then the old preacher said to himself: "I'll just hide behind the door, and when my son comes home from school this afternoon, I'll see which of these three things he picks up. If he picks up the Bible, he'll be a preacher like me, and what a blessing that would be. If he picks up the \$20, he's going to be a businessman, and that would be okay too. But if he picks up the bottle, he's going to be a drunkard, and, Lord, what a shame that would be." The old man was anxious as he heard his son come into the house just a-whistling. The boy threw his books on the bed, turned to leave, and spotted the objects on the table. Curious, he walked over to look at them. After a second he picked up the Bible and placed it under his arm. Dad started to beam. Then he picked up the \$20 bill, stuffed it in his pocket, uncorked the bottle, and took a big swig. "Lord, have mercy," the old man whispered. "He's going to be a politician."

It's a good budget, but I guess what I'm trying to say is that nobody in this Assembly should take themselves too seriously in thinking that government and government spending can make all things good and solve all things bad. We're all politicians. Most want to do good, and the budget is just a setting of priorities within a fiscal framework.

Highways are a priority. Please, fix highway 63 quickly. I drove it both ways to Fort McMurray last weekend, and I hope the construction is not too slow. Get the routes to the heartland upgraders ready. If you waste time, you waste everybody's time and

stress the economy. It is a proper role of government to move quickly on these projects to save lives, to move goods and services efficiently, and to just save travel time and frustration.

4:10

Municipal infrastructure support is key. Don't be afraid to attach a few strings to make sure that it isn't all spent on pet projects. Don't be afraid to ensure that it's spent wisely. Community facilities monies of \$819 million will be incredibly welcomed by communities. I've already seen the happy, indeed joyful anticipation of planned better community public-use facilities in northeast Edmonton. What better way to promote wellness, create communities, and cut gang violence than getting people into these wholesome activities. The biker bars will hate you guys across the way here in government. You're just doing too much good with this one. And, yes, the new Edmonton Remand Centre is important; just don't put it in the northeast. Thanks for that one.

Health spending is up substantially. We must reduce the waiting times. Let's continue to innovate delivery methods such as the hip replacement program and other similar efforts now in implementation. These projects work, provide better service, and save money to the system and to the economy in the long run. Train physicians here. Increase rural training. Train nurses here. Look closely at the Saskatchewan success of training rural aboriginal women as practical nurses to alleviate the shortages in hospitals and long-term care.

The increase to Education in the budget, again, exceeds inflation. The education of our children determines our future. It starts with early childhood education, and our government cannot forget those at risk of being lost at an early age. We must refocus how we approach vocational education. There are far fewer kids learning skills on the farm anymore. There are far too many latchkey and condo kids learning no practical skills at all. Many have no idea what to do when they start a job, how to chip in and work as a team. It's no wonder that they drop out, wander the streets, and learn other team skills.

It is time to settle the teachers' pension question. This is a liability that goes back far too long and will stretch into the future. The \$157 million towards unfunded liabilities is a beginning, but it is time to ready the next budget to fix this once and for all.

The money spent for school capital projects is key. New areas require new schools. Many schools in my neighbourhood of northeast Edmonton are bursting at the seams. Some had enrollments this year 50 per cent higher than expected in their projections for September. Northeast Edmonton residents need new schools. I understand that there are pressures on school boards in trying to move forward in these difficult construction times.

Advanced education, innovation, and research are key to our future economy. We must commercialize research and find venture capital to do so. We must look for more diverse ways to deliver apprenticeship training. We must better utilize the strengths of the building trades' training of our trades. The real idea of apprenticeship is to have trades training trades. It always has been.

A 37 per cent increase in student assistance is considerable, but I continue to think that we can invest further. I don't think it makes sense to charge apprentice fees at all, and tuition should not be a barrier to learning, to advancing oneself at the same time one is foregoing income. Money spent on students is an investment in the future for all Albertans.

Affordable housing initiatives are crucial in a boom-stressed economy. The waiting list for subsidized housing for those on limited incomes must be reduced. We must never forget the contribution of seniors and understand how so many are stressed because of rising pressures on fixed incomes. The measures in the

budget are a beginning. Encouraging home ownership is still a best option. We should expand measures to encourage self-help and group-help organizations for home ownership like Habitat for Humanity.

Public safety and crime remain the most talked about items when I go door to door. I was at the opening of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force yesterday, and I look forward to the results of their work. Seniors are afraid to go out. Parents will not allow their children to walk to school. If we are looking at emissions control from vehicles, it would do wonders to lessen the lineups of parents picking up their kids in their cars because they fear for their kids' safety.

There must be continued pressure on the federal government and the justice system. I hear time and again: if you do the crime, you should do the time. You can't solve all of society's problems by being nice to people, especially if they are predators. The same holds true for the youth criminal justice system. There must be consequences for those who do not care about the rights of others. The majority of offenders should not go scot-free because it is the nice thing to do or because we feel sorry that their parents didn't do them right. We must make it possible for our streets to be living streets free of fear.

There are many, many more things I would love to raise today, but there are more debates to come. I do appreciate the measures in this budget that look to build our sense of community in Alberta. We need hockey; we need soccer and ballet and kung fu and karate for the kids. We need places where we can gather. We need to be able to walk in the streets without fear.

I am pleased to support this budget, Mr. Speaker. Albertans I talk to like many, many of the measures. I commend the government in its growth initiatives and its sense of balance. Alberta supports this budget. It is in touch with its needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I guess that I'd just like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning for such an excellent speech. It's become obvious now why the Liberals kicked him out of their caucus. Obviously, this member is a straight shooter. He is a thinker. I guess perhaps that the Leader of the Opposition doesn't like free thinkers in his caucus.

I guess that what I will say is simply this. Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) it allows time for comments by members, and my comment is: you've given us some great ideas, and thank you, member, very, very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. member wish to respond?

**Mr. Backs:** I appreciate the words from the member, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head:

## Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 31 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007.

The three key objectives of Bill 31 are, number one, to amend the involuntary admission criteria to allow earlier interventions; number two, implement community treatment orders; and, number three, require physicians to provide treatment recommendations to patients' family physicians when patients are discharged.

Mr. Speaker, the first key amendment will revise the involuntary admission criteria. The current Mental Health Act allows for the apprehension, examination, and involuntary admission of persons who are, one, "suffering from mental disorder"; two, are unwilling to be admitted voluntarily; and, three, are "in a condition presenting or likely to present a danger to [self] or others." The courts in Alberta have interpreted the last criterion to mean imminent physical danger. Family members of individuals with mental illness express concerns about this situation. They are also concerned that their loved ones often do not receive the treatment they need until they reach the point of being a danger to themselves or others.

In response to these concerns the admission criteria have been amended to say "likely to cause harm to the person or others" so that earlier intervention is permitted. The criteria have also been amended to include the concept of "substantial mental or physical deterioration" on the part of the patient, which again permits earlier intervention. Mr. Speaker, this is very, very important. This is something that, certainly, my constituents have been asking for, and in talking to other MLAs, many constituents across Alberta are asking for changes to the Mental Health Act that will allow earlier intervention.

Mr. Speaker, the second set of key amendments will allow community treatment orders, or CTOs. Some individuals with serious mental disorders are caught in what we call the revolving-door syndrome. They are admitted to hospital when they meet the criteria for involuntary admission, but then they're subsequently discharged when they're stabilized and no longer meet those criteria. After discharge they cease treatment in the community and are again readmitted when they meet the criteria again. So that's the revolving door.

Community treatment orders will assist revolving-door patients and provide an additional treatment option that is less restrictive than remaining as an involuntary patient in a facility. Community treatment orders will be issued by two physicians, one of whom must be a psychiatrist, and describe the treatment and care that is to be provided in the patient's community. The orders will identify the practitioners who will provide these services. The community treatment order will also identify the person responsible for the supervision of the order, and community treatment orders will expire after six months unless they are amended, renewed, or cancelled.

4:20

Now, although community treatment orders are primarily consent based, it is important to ensure that in situations where public safety is a concern, an individual may be required to be subject to a community treatment order if the individual is to continue to live in the community, thus the name.

In order to ensure the protection of individuals' rights, community treatment orders may be appealed to a mental health review panel as well as further appeal to the courts. So this bill also includes provisions to address situations where individuals are not complying with the treatment and care required under community treatment orders. If anyone has reason to believe that a person may not be complying with a community treatment order, or a CTO, that person may bring information before a court. If appropriate, the court could

then issue a warrant for apprehension that would require the person to be re-examined to see if the individual should continue on a CTO, whether the community treatment order should be cancelled, or whether involuntary admission is required. Similarly, if a physician has reason to believe that a person may not be complying with their CTO, the physician may issue an order which permits apprehension and re-examination.

Mr. Speaker, finally, there is one last amendment that will require a mental health facility to provide a patient's discharge summary and further treatment recommendations to the patient's family physician, if known, when the patient is discharged. There's a similar provision that applies when a community treatment order expires.

The availability of adequate community-based mental health services is an important component of the success of CTOs. With a network of over 85 community mental health clinics across the province, a provincial mental health plan and regional mental health plans that promote community options, and investment in enhanced community services through the mental health innovation fund, I believe that Alberta is well positioned to support the implementation of CTOs.

The Mental Health Amendment Act will have resource and cost implications for the ministry and regional health authorities, but government will seek to keep these at a minimum. In fact, it is anticipated that the cost savings resulting from earlier intervention and reduced readmissions will actually mitigate the implementation costs of the amendments.

This bill will be supported by accompanying measures to enhance community-based mental health services that will help Albertans living with mental illness and their families to access early intervention services and to enjoy full and productive lives.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say again that I'm very honoured to be able to bring this bill forward. It was originally going to be a private member's bill put forward by myself in this session. It was going to be Bill 209. I want to thank Parliamentary Counsel Shannon Dean, who did a lot of work on that bill and really brought it to the stage that we're looking at right now. I also want to thank the minister of health and the previous minister of health for agreeing to bring this forward as a government bill and, again, for giving me the honour and opportunity to carry this bill.

In conclusion, I ask support of the House for Bill 31, and I move second reading of Bill 31. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak during the debate on Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. This I think is probably, at least in my constituency, the most controversial bill that will be up in this 2007 legislative agenda. It has generated a great deal of debate in my constituency and, I know, in many other constituencies. I think that debate is a good thing. I am actually quite encouraged to see the amount of lively interaction that the ideas that are encompassed in this bill have generated. I have to say that the debate has also gone on in the Liberal caucus. There has certainly been strong support for the bill. There has also been strong nonsupport, and these views are all very strongly held. I think it's given us all in the Official Opposition caucus a great opportunity for enhanced communication with our constituents.

So given all of the above I have recommended to our caucus that we have a free vote on this government bill. Usually you would have the whip on in the Official Opposition responding to a government bill, but as the shadow minister I recommended a free vote to allow the MLAs to best represent their own constituents and

allow all voices to be heard. My caucus has concurred with that. So I guess that henceforth I'm not speaking as the shadow minister for Health and Wellness but as the MLA for Edmonton-Centre.

I think that the integral base starting point of agreement for me on this bill is, I believe, that we can all agree that if there was enough support offered to individuals and organizations, instruments like CTOs would not be needed, and that is the world that I continue to work for. I have communicated at length and spoken and met with individuals from the Edmonton and Calgary chapters of the provincial organization of the Schizophrenia Society and a number of others, and we have all agreed on that point. We've also all agreed that the process of deinstitutionalization was never completed in this province, and frankly I think it can be argued that it was never completed in a number of places. We took people out of the institutions. We said that we were going to offer them supports in the community, and we never completed that journey or that continuum of support.

So what do I see today in my constituency and others that contact me from outside of my constituency? I see the mentally ill struggling to find safe, appropriate housing. I see them struggling with economic security to be able to feed and clothe and appropriately purchase medicine and other holistic health and wellness articles for themselves. I see them struggle with meaningful activity so they can contribute to society and give their lives dignity. I think that many of these individuals need access to services in their community. They need access to psychiatric services. They need access to mental health workers. They need access to home care, and they need access to health and wellness programs. These things are not there for them, and although they seek and although they try, those things are not there for them. That contributes to the situation that some of them find themselves in, and I'll come back to that.

I see these constituents struggling with the lack of all of these things, and they are often vulnerable as a result of that. They are in many cases not well physically. They may not be well clothed. They may not be able to engage in a great deal of personal hygiene, and I see that they are often bullied, assaulted, robbed, frightened, and threatened on the street. So the stereotype of, you know, the crazy, mentally ill guy who threatens people on the street, that's a complete myth. The person who is most likely to be assaulted, to be robbed, to be threatened is actually someone who has a mental illness because in all likelihood they're not well, and they're a sitting duck for somebody that wants to pick on them.

I find the situation that the families of people with a mental illness are in to be really desperate. The families tell me: "I want to look after my loved one. I want to support them, but I can't bring that person into my household. I have a young child. I live in a studio apartment." There are a number of reasons why family members may not be able to help as they would like to, and they feel abandoned. They feel that the government never supplied the support services that were necessary to assist people with mental illness to live, you know, full and meaningful lives in the community. They've cut resources.

#### 4:30

When all the chips are down and the police have been called because somebody is talking to themselves in the mall, the family ends up being called, "Come and do something about this guy," and I underline "do something." They feel helpless. They feel abandoned. They feel desperate. They need help. Now, some of them clearly feel that CTOs will give them that help, but I disagree. I don't think this bill will give them the help that they're looking for. It won't give a person with a mental illness the resources and support that they're looking for.

I believe with every fibre in my body that any suggestion to curb or narrow or curtail someone's human or civil rights should never be done unless there is an absolutely ironclad, proven result. I cannot find that result in the implementation of CTOs, and I have looked. I've looked at outcomes in programs that have been running in the U.S. over long periods of time and short periods of time. I've looked at various other provinces that have had them in place, some of them for as little as a year and some of them for longer than that. I have not been convinced by what I've seen.

Interestingly, where the studies come back and say, "Yes, here's an example of where a CTO was successful," it's always in combination with what they call aggressive or assertive community treatment, and what would that be, Mr. Speaker? Well, goodness, that's exactly what I started out talking about. It's about appropriate and safe housing. It's about economic security. It's about enough food to eat. It's about enough medical attention for them. So, really, we didn't need the CTOs. We needed those supports, and they're not there.

This legislation will not create one more dollar on your AISH benefit. It will not give one more housing unit. It does not give one more support. It does not give one more treatment bed in a psychiatric facility, in a hospital, or in one of our psychiatric institutions. It does not give us any more programming in support of mental illness. It does none of those things.

What I believe it does do is it violates the autonomy of the individual. It takes away their choice. It takes away their ability to define themselves and to make choices about their lives. The argument I hear back is: well, they're not in their right mind; they're incapacitated. Okay, fine. I can understand that at a certain point, if someone's incapacitated, we may need to step in. But I would argue that you need to have something in place that allows that person, when they are in their right mind, to make those decisions about their own care.

We are moving towards a medical model that is about the right to refuse treatment. It is about that ability of people to say: no, I don't want that. So if we really want to implement something like this, we must put in place things like personal directives so that when someone is well and understanding what their circumstances are, they can make a personal directive about what they would wish done to them and with them when they are incapacitated, and that gives them some control and some choice over their own life, which I argue is the base of human dignity. If we will not allow people that kind of autonomy and choice over their lives, then I don't think we're being a very fair or a very just society.

What I find gets put in place with a CTO is a perpetual parole. They're never finished. Even for someone who robs a store and gets convicted and serves their time, once they serve their time, they're done. If they get out early on parole, once they've served their parole, they're done. It's over. This is never done. What's contemplated in this legislation is that it can be reviewed and perpetuated forever. They just keep going back under the provisions of this legislation and getting it renewed again and again and again and again and again and again, ad infinitum. There's never an end to it. It can be renewed forever or until a person dies. So that scimitar hangs over you forever. Once you've had a CTO on you, you never get out from underneath it. They can just keep reinstating it. To me that's wrong. If we treat people in our justice and penal systems with more rights than we treat the mentally ill, there is something very, very wrong with the system, and I object to that. Clearly, I object to it.

I said earlier that CTOs violate a move towards the right to refuse medical treatment. The other directions that we're clearly going that are supported by a number of innovations in health care and in wellness and prevention across the world are things like evidence-

based decision-making. Well, we're not getting evidence-based decision-making with this bill and with the suggestion of CTOs. I can find a few suggestions of some studies that have been done in the States where it might have made some difference, but they really couldn't prove it. Well, that is not evidence-based decision-making. I argue that you cannot take away someone's civil rights unless you are absolutely stone cold sure that it's going to have a positive result, and I don't see that happening here.

The other thing is that we're moving towards least invasive procedure, and I would argue that CTOs are the most invasive. There are other, lesser versions of this that have been adopted in some of the other provinces. I'm going to say Saskatchewan and B.C., and I might be wrong, but some of them have, basically, community support orders, which are a less invasive version of community treatment orders than what is anticipated here.

So I want to talk about, specifically, what the legislation is doing here. Specifically, this legislation is changing the definition. It is removing our long-held belief that we leave people alone until they are an immediate danger to themselves or to others, and at that point there's an intervention. I understand the argument from the families that say: we need to be able to cope with a deterioration, which signals a longer period of time. So this legislation is removing the idea of immediacy, and it is drawing it out into a much longer time period, a much more drawn-out situation.

This legislation does not distinguish between types of mental illness, so someone who is clinically depressed, which is likely to happen to many, many people, or someone who is bipolar is treated no differently than someone who is schizophrenic or psychotic. There's no difference whatsoever. There's no definition in here that distinguishes between the kind of mental illness that somebody is dealing with and the duration that they have been under treatment or have been diagnosed with that particular mental illness.

Think carefully, my friends, very, very carefully, about putting this one through. We know from the mental health experts and advocates that we work with in the community that mental illness affects at least 20 per cent of the population, 1 in 5. They're now saying, actually, folks, that it's closer to 1 in 3 people. There are 83 members of this Assembly. We have to acknowledge that mental illness is part of our society. Now, I'm going to go back and remind you all here that this legislation makes no distinction whatsoever about what kind of mental illness would be eligible to be locked up under a CTO. I think you need to think a bit more carefully about that one. Nothing in this bill addresses the root causes of what has brought a person to a point of deterioration where you would need that kind of aggressive intervention.

A couple of other things I'd like to refute the sponsoring member on. He said: well, there are two doctors that are needed, there's a great appeal process in place, and it's all hunky-dory. Actually, read the whole bill. It says: two doctors, one of whom must be a psychiatrist. But if you read a little further along, it actually says that, well, if you don't have a psychiatrist, a regular doc will do as long as it's checked somewhere down the road by a psychiatrist. So don't tell me that this needs a psychiatrist to put this in place. It clearly doesn't. For places like Grande Prairie, which now has no psychiatrist left – and I think Fort McMurray was cruising close to that – you could have two doctors committing people to these CTOs. And, my friends, what if there are no treatment beds available in that location? It can still happen. Read the rest of the bill.

So, one, the orders can be renewed over and over and over again and ad infinitum. There's no end to it. You can have two doctors certifying this as long as it's checked somewhere down the road by a psychiatrist. Well, you've already been locked up, so it's a bit late for that.

I was reassured when I was given a briefing about this that they couldn't put a community treatment order in place if there was no place to actually apprehend and commit the person. Well, I'm not finding that in the bill, actually, so if you want to highlight it and send it over to me, I'd be happy to see it.

4:40

I've already talked about that the orders can be reviewed and reinstated to infinity.

So the changing of the test here, I think, from "present a danger" to "likely to cause harm" – and that's the language that we're using here – is very problematic.

One of the things that this bill does not encourage is that it doesn't do anything to improve medication. Why do so many people get in trouble, where they're in that situation where somebody would want to be committing them or where they'd be considered in a deteriorating situation or maybe just imminently a danger to themselves and others? A lot of it is because the meds are terrible. These are meds that make people feel sick. They have huge side effects, and we've had very little improvement in them in many, many decades. People get on the meds, they get straightened out, and the first thing they do is try and get off those meds because they make them feel so sick. The side effects are so enormous. So where is the pressure from us as a government to say to the big pharma: "Get a better medication. This would help us. Work on better medication rather than this medication that people want to get off"? With their very lives at stake, the first thing they want to do is get off the medication. Well, pressure the big pharma to get a better medication happening.

Some of the things that my constituents have brought forward to me that they have suggested would be helpful are enhanced legal services to protect the civil and legal rights of people with mental illness, one point of entry for all psychiatric services, case managers for each consumer or patient who will ensure that their needs are met and thereby help to reduce the deterioration, daily contact with someone such as an outreach worker, more psychiatrists, increased access to home care – there's a thought – funding to hire more mental health workers, provision of affordable, safe housing, housing with graduated supports, a stronger response to stigma and discrimination – for example, the same as is called for in the Kirby report – and the institution of advanced directives.

Again I say that without strong evidence of effectiveness, legislators have a responsibility to avoid making changes that would restrict the basic right of persons to make decisions for themselves.

I'll end with a quote. This is from Cathy, who is a community health nurse and co-ordinator of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee.

I've been a community health nurse for twenty years – for the last twelve as a street nurse, working with people who are homeless. I know I will never . . . use CTOs. The Mental Health Act functions adequately to protect people who become very ill. Yet it is no substitute for the care and support some people need on an ongoing basis and that includes competent and caring community based mental health care, decent housing, mental and emotional health supports and enough money to live on. These are the building blocks for dignity for people with mental health problems.

And, I would argue, meaningful activities in their lives that give their lives dignity and meaning. I've never met someone who had a mental illness or who was homeless that said: yeah, I just want to sack out all day long. All of them want to do something that contributes to society, and they want to have dignity.

So I argue that this bill should not be supported. I disagree with the principle that is in this bill. I look forward to listening to the debate of others, but I would say for the reasons that I have spelled out in the time that I've had that this is not a bill that ultimately will help those who have mental illness in our society. We need to

understand that this is an increasing issue. One out of every 3 people in our society will deal with a mental health issue at some point in their life, and locking them up under a CTO is not the answer.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 31, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. It's a very important bill. I've spent a fair bit of time looking through it, and as I was reflecting on what this bill really means, what came to mind was an earlier piece of legislation passed in this Legislature a long time ago, in the 1920s, the Alberta sterilization act.

Mr. Speaker, when we debate these pieces of legislation that have ramifications for the liberties and civil rights of Albertans, albeit they are couched in a language of providing medical services for people in need, we are treading on very, very dangerous territory. We need to be extremely careful in relying exclusively on medical science, scientific advice because experience and history have told us that science, including the medical sciences, is an imperfect tool. They're always in need of change, modification. They do change. Treatments change. Theories of illnesses change. The kind of appropriate treatments that are needed, obviously, change and follow. In the meantime, if we are not aware of the fallibility of these services and the science underlying them, we can create serious harm by passing legislation that doesn't pay attention to other issues that need to be addressed along with the medical basis of the argument that calls for the legislation.

The sterilization act passed in this Legislature, as I said, in the '20s did fundamental harm, very serious harm to lots of Albertans. It violated their fundamental rights, Charter rights. The people who were hurt irreversibly by sterilization decisions and actions that were taken, the people who were the recipients of them, had to go all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to make two points: first, to have the point established that their fundamental rights had been violated by this piece of legislation, and secondly, to seek restitution for the harm that was done to them by the state.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to make reference to other places in recent history where mental illness has been used as an instrument to repress dissent in those societies. We have to be very careful that as a Legislature, as part of a structure of a state that's democratic, that's respectful of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that Canadians are entitled to, we learn from those instances in history, whether it's a state that has used mental illness as a tool of repression against people who disagree and express dissent with the repressive policies of that state or whether it's simply because the science which was used in order to sort of engage in social engineering, as this Legislature did in 1928, proved to be wrong, inaccurate, unreliable, proven totally deficient by later research and so on and so forth.

When we know that these things have happened, including what happened in this Legislature, things that have therefore done irreparable harm to individuals and citizens living in this province and elsewhere, I think we need to be careful. So this bill, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, needs to be scrutinized in light of those lessons that we must necessarily draw from in our own experience in this province and experiences in other places.

The Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, before us, Bill 31, essentially makes one major change in the existing piece of legislation. It introduces another form of dealing with people who are deemed to be mentally ill.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, I must remind the House that medicalization of aberrant behaviour associated with mental illness is a continuing

theme. It's certainly in the interest of people who sell medications, who manufacture medications to of course create a greater demand for their products. I was reading a review article in the *New York Review of Books* just two days ago, where there was an interesting debate. This article, this piece of writing engages in a serious debate on the variety of ways in which illnesses get defined and the medications for them get discovered, prepared, manufactured. Then the marketing campaigns start to legitimize illnesses and the diagnoses of them, and then the demand for the medications needed to deal with that disorder is of course expanded.

There are all kinds of reasons why I think it's important for us to be very careful. The issue of overmedication, the issue of defining what's a mental disorder and what kind of behaviour is considered a mental disorder are contested and contestable questions. There are no black-and-white answers to these questions. Therefore, all the more reason why we should be approaching this piece of legislation with extreme care.

This bill, as I said, makes one major change in the existing piece of legislation. It makes a provision for community treatment orders in addition to the so-called formal patient status that is a part of the existing piece of legislation, which committed people to a mental treatment facility and didn't provide for anything else.

Another bit of background to this: when we came to the realization in the '80s that institutionalization was not the answer, all of a sudden deinstitutionalization began to be debated. In fact, it became a more attractive alternative for all kinds of reasons. Scientific evidence provided some good reasons why people shouldn't be committed to mental institutions: they become sicker as they go into mental institutions and get isolated from mainstream society. Deinstitutionalization was seen as an attractive alternative to the failing set of policies that led to incarceration indefinitely into mental health facilities and hospitals, but deinstitutionalization got hijacked by the stronger desire in the '90s to cut back government services in order to meet the demands of paying down the debt, reducing the deficit.

So a variety of reasons, all very different from each other and not necessarily in agreement on the ultimate goals, interacted with each other to justify very quick and rapid deinstitutionalization. Over the last 10, 15 years we have seen lots of Albertans on the streets of our towns and communities and neighbourhoods who, in fact, were let go from the hospitals without appropriate support being provided in the communities.

Deinstitutionalization, if undertaken properly, implemented appropriately, would have required first putting in place appropriate support systems, treatment systems, community organizations that would help people who have been let go from the mental hospitals to be able to reintegrate back into the mainstream with the appropriate supports available to them. That was not the case, unfortunately, so we had on our hands over the last 10 years a growing mental health crisis.

I remember meeting with mental health advocates about five, six years ago, and one of their primary concerns was that they were the ones who had been in fact advocating deinstitutionalization, yet the form in which deinstitutionalization was introduced and offered to them led to making the problems related to mental health services graver than they were before deinstitutionalization. So CTOs are now a response to, in my view, the wrong-headed way in which deinstitutionalization was implemented.

Community treatment orders: sure, they are issued for only six months at a time as provided for in this piece of legislation, but they can be renewed ad infinitum every six months. On the advice of a psychiatrist or a physician you can have another six months' renewal, so renewal after renewal after renewal. That raises quest-

ions about the civil rights and the legal rights of people who suffer from mental illness and are put on these CTOs. Now, CTOs look like it's a voluntary decision; it's a consent-based decision. Mr. Speaker, let's not kid ourselves. CTOs are in fact quite restrictive of the civil rights and the legal rights of these people.

Of course, Bill 31 makes provision for appealing CTOs, community treatment orders, even going to the Court of Appeal to be heard if one who is subject to a CTO is unhappy with the issuance of that order, but there's no provision in this bill as to who is going to pay for this if there's a legal recourse available to people who are mentally ill. Because they are mentally ill, most of them either cannot work or work in jobs that barely provide them a living wage. How are they going to be able to seek this opportunity of the right to appeal? How can they exercise it? It cannot be exercised.

Unless we have a provision in this bill that allows for some sort of legal aid, legal resources made available to people who are subject to CTOs, the provision here for appeal and the right to go to the next level, to the Court of Appeal, I think is an empty promise. It's a promise that cannot be implemented. I think there needs to be a guarantee here in this bill that CTOs, when issued, if they are subject to appeal, that appeal procedures and the costs involved in pursuing that course of action would be made available to these patients based on the knowledge that these people themselves are not in an economic position and situation where they themselves can pay if they exercise the right to appeal.

Mr. Speaker, it's a bill that needs very careful attention by all of us. I think one member speaking before me drew attention to the fact that at least 20 per cent of us seem to be, in some form or another, mentally unwell. I'm not sure about that. I'm skeptical about these numbers, these percentages. These are obviously based on an existing knowledge base, but an existing knowledge base drawn from the science of psychiatry and whatever have you is always something that's to be taken with a grain of salt.

The last point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, to conclude, is that a bill such as this, which will restrict the civil rights and freedoms of Albertans, must also be one which comes for a review after four or five years. Even if this piece of legislation passes the Legislature, I think that there should be a legislative provision that it will have to come back to the Legislature for a thorough review at the end of five years so that we then know how CTOs work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) we have a question/comment period available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Little Bow on the debate.

**Mr. McFarland:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to put a couple of my own comments on the record and throw them out for discussion. I heard an awful lot about sterilization. I've heard an awful lot about legal rights and freedoms of individuals that might suffer from mental duress. It's my opinion and my understanding of history that this is a moot point, comparing this to sterilization. From the information that I have, sterilization was done, true, and it was discontinued in the early 1970s. It was done at the time as probably one of the very few good ways of addressing an issue. That technology has changed substantially since that time.

5:00

It's also my understanding that in this province people who underwent sterilization were not just put into a room and sterilized. It was after family and parental consent and awareness and acknowledgement were given. I can't say that for certain, but I am fairly intimate for the past 37 years with somebody who worked in that field. That was the impression that I was left with, after many of the

nurses trained in Ponoka who were there at the time of the last of the sterilization. So I think it's a red herring to throw this sterilization issue into the debate on this particular bill.

Secondly, legal rights and freedoms. Yes, that's a very real concern, but I think it has to also be balanced against the public good and the safety of the health care provider. I know that many people – the numbers 1 out of 4, 1 out of 3 have been thrown out at the end of the previous speaker's comments – might be affected by some form of mental illness. I guess if we look around, that means that anywhere from 20 to 27 of us in this Assembly either don't know what we're talking about or have some reason to maybe wonder if we're all there. That's just meant as a lighthearted note because if that's the case, we shouldn't even be debating the bill.

On the other hand, you know, the support services. Three of us that are currently in this Assembly did a mental health review back in the middle '90s. At that time – and, again, I'm going off memory – approximately 40 per cent of the mental health facility beds at Ponoka, Oliver, Claresholm, and Raymond had already been changed to such an extent that 40 per cent of the patients at that time had been put out into the community. Now, there were two trains of thought, it seemed to me. There were those who thought that there was no place in society for any mental health facility at all, and everyone in any kind of a mental institution should be put out into the community. There were those who said that some of those people could be moved out into communities, but there were some who, because of the length of time they'd been in, their age, the inability to have any family connection who was willing to help take care of them, needed to be under 24-hour supervision because of the severity of their mental illness.

Now, as I recall, our mental health task force also recommended that should people be put into the community, depending on their illness it would require anywhere from three to five core essential support services, which the second speaker actually talked about. I would say that in the rush to take a lot of people out of mental health facilities and put them into communities, those same people that advocated no institutions were the first not to remember that there was going to be a very great need for some very core 24-hour essential services, which weren't promised by the government, which weren't delivered by the government. But some people wanted everyone out into the communities.

Now, that brings me to the point of the CTOs. Some of those very same people might very well have ended up on AISH. I've seen examples and heard of far more where people that are suffering from a mental illness, who happen to be on AISH, are now out of money by a certain time of the month. They're feeling pretty good because they've been on medication, which one speaker says that they do great harm to you, but there are some medications which make the patients actually feel quite well, to the point that they feel so good they don't think they have to take medication anymore. Then all of a sudden they go about-face. They get either a little bit edgy, violent, or out of money, and they end up doing a circle back through psychiatry again.

Now, to me that's counterproductive. If at the same time there's a volunteer unit available and the people feel that they're good enough that they don't have to be there but some health care provider, whether it's a doctor or a nurse, can see that they have the potential to do harm to themselves, to others, to staff, and want that person to be maintained in a facility to be monitored and to get them back onto a regime of treatment, why isn't that CTO a good tool to have? The police can already be called, but why should they have to be mental health workers on top of all the other things that they have to do out in the public?

I'm just throwing a few comments out on the floor, Mr. Speaker. I'm not speaking as a professional by any stretch, but I have heard

a lot of comments over the years. I've been on the psych unit a few times, visiting with a lot of staff. I'd suggest that before we focus all on patient rights and legal rights and civil rights, we also give consideration to the public, to the health care providers that are trying to help these folks, and to look at the good, positive parts of another tool that would enable, yes, just a doctor. Don't forget that in some of the volunteer units psychiatrists are not available at beck and call. They have to be called in, and sometimes it's of such urgency that the staff and a medical doctor need to make the determination of what treatment is provided.

With that, I'll sit down and take my place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order (29)(2)(a) is available. Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on Standing Order (29)(2)(a)?

**Mr. Elsalhy:** No. On the bill.

**The Deputy Speaker:** On the debate.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and contribute to this discussion on Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, as introduced and moved by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. I will try not to repeat some of the arguments from both sides of the House with respect to the support of or the rejection of this idea of community treatment orders.

As indicated by my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Centre, the Official Opposition House Leader, we have agreed in the Alberta Liberal caucus to treat this as a free vote because it is quite an important issue that should not be approached, you know, from a partisan standpoint. This is an issue that basically talks about people.

Many different people in the community have approached members from both sides of the House with respect to this issue, and they're split. They're divided. Some people are adamant in the protection of individual rights, patient rights. Some people are equally passionate about the need for better psychiatric supports for individuals who have mental illness. Both sides of the issue are equally vocal, and they both present a very solid case. They're both strong believers in what they stand for, and they are lobbying members of this Assembly to side with them, to basically accept their approach and their side of the story because they feel that they're right and they want us to support them in their quest for or against.

So, yes, we have to approach this, you know, as individuals, and we should really think about individuals who feel either way. It's an issue of balance, and like everything we do here, Mr. Speaker, we are attempting to arrive at a balance. Be it financial decisions, be it societal decisions, be it health care decisions, we are trying to achieve a balance that is sometimes elusive or difficult to achieve. You can't be a hundred per cent right. You're bound to please some, but you're also bound to displease some. As such, this is a difficult decision for myself, and I bet that it's a difficult decision for you, for every member of this House. How do we vote with respect to this bill? Do we support it, do we support it with amendments, or do we reject it outright?

5:10

We definitely need to look at this balance that we're trying to arrive at. Patients have rights. Individuals have rights, of course, to refuse treatment. This is granted to them in the Charter, for example. But there is also the expectation that society at large looks

after the interests of those who might at times not be able to make those decisions for themselves.

Now, stakeholders in the community and people from the medical profession are also split on this issue, Mr. Speaker. Jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere are split. Some people accept this idea and embrace it. Some people denounce it. They say: no, it's not the right way. And there are jurisdictions and professionals who are everywhere in between. So we have from the one extreme to the other, and then we have people at different stages in that window.

If we look for advice from, you know, people who are on the ground, front line, hands on, we get some hesitancy or skepticism on the part of the Alberta Mental Health Board, for example, and also some hesitancy or skepticism from the Canadian Mental Health Association.

If I remember correctly, a physician in the capital region here, Dr. P.J. White, of the Canadian Mental Health Association – he's also the Capital health regional clinical program director – sounded or registered some hesitancy because he feels that supports within the community, supports that basically are allocated towards comprehensive systems of community-based initiatives are definitely the preferred way. They're a positive alternative to community treatment orders. His approach was that we may not need community treatment orders if adequate supports are available on the ground in the community, but they're not. So this is the one side of the debate.

On the other side of the debate you get an organization like the Schizophrenia Society, which advocates the establishment or the enactment of some type of community treatment order. Now, is any one organization more credible or should it be listened to more attentively than the other? No. They're both equally credible, and we should really consider very seriously where we stand with respect to this. Professionals are split, governments elsewhere are split, and we should not rush to any conclusion in this House, Mr. Speaker.

Now, as a layman I think that until the individual turns 18, he or she is looked at as a minor, and his or her legal guardian can make decisions of this magnitude for him or her. Once a person reaches 18 and exceeds that age, then the question becomes more complex, as we all know.

When a person is over 18, Mr. Speaker, cases should be evaluated individually. We should not have a one-size-fits-all approach to community treatment orders. They should be evaluated individually, especially when a treatment order involves in most cases the person being locked up or incarcerated. It's not like we're forcing them to take their medication, but they're sleeping in their own bed every night. They're likely going to be separated from their family and from the surroundings that they're accustomed to and comfortable in, and they're taken someplace where they are actually forced to take their medication and monitored, and they're probably subjected to lab tests to make sure that, you know, adequate levels of that medication are in their system and so on. As such, I have some questions, very briefly.

This bill is attempting to expand the category of people that are captured under this definition, who are eligible for community treatment orders, from the current definition, which is a person who presents "a danger to . . . others," to what is proposed, which is a person who is "likely to cause harm . . . or to suffer substantial mental or physical deterioration or serious physical impairment."

Now, I would be more comfortable – and there is not going to be any debate in this House – if it's a person who is posing a threat to others, somebody who is creating a danger for others, for society, for his own family, for people or property. Fine, they need to be dealt with, and this is provided for in the current act. Expanding this: I need to hear from the hon. sponsor of the bill or from other members who are in favour. Why are we expanding it, and why are we trying



to cast a bigger net to catch more people under this definition? As a matter of fact, anybody who is likely to cause harm or who is likely to suffer substantial mental or physical deterioration should be a candidate for a program that is currently existing, should be a candidate for the government to say: "You know what? We have a treatment bed for you in the west end of Edmonton. We have another one in Leduc. We have another one in Drayton Valley." That should be available right now. The stricter definition of somebody who is posing a threat to others should be, you know, the extreme. It shouldn't be the norm. We should look at community treatment orders as a last measure, not as a catch-all approach, Mr. Speaker. So that was my first question.

My second question is: do we have any statistics or do we have any studies that tell us how prevalent, you know, these situations are? How badly do we need community treatment orders? Why aren't the current systems adequate? Why aren't they functioning? If they're missing or if they're not adequate, why are they not fully funded, for example? Or what can we do to enhance the mental care landscape in this province, Mr. Speaker? I need statistics. I need studies that actually indicate why this is such a wonderful move and why now, also studies with respect to the effectiveness of community treatment orders.

Again, I mentioned that people are divided and even members of the medical community are divided as to how effective community treatment orders are. So I need to be convinced. If they are effective, how effective? What can we do to use the CTOs as part of a bigger picture approach? You know, medicating an individual, Mr. Speaker, is only one part of that therapy continuum, of that big picture.

I should know a thing or two about drug therapy because I'm a pharmacist by profession. However, from the first day in the first year of pharmacy school they teach you that medications are not the one solution. They're not the only solution. It's part of a bigger picture, and it's a picture, Mr. Speaker, that, quite honestly, involves the patient himself. The patient is part of that triangle of care or square of care. A triangle has three sides. There is the patient, there is the physician – in this case it would be a psychiatrist – and there's also the pharmacist. With a square you can add a nurse practitioner, now that we are relying on more nurses and more nurse practitioners in our system, partly because we don't have enough psychiatrists and enough physicians in the system. Community care could be interpreted as one of those fourth arms. Anyway, I just wanted to put it on the record that drug therapy is not the only solution. It's part of a bigger picture approach.

I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre talked about better drugs. To briefly contradict my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona, it's not the people who provide the drugs – pharmacists are not to blame here. Some drug companies are better in doing R and D, in doing research to come up with better medications or better drug therapies. Some are not as progressive and are not as forward thinking as others. But pharmacists for the most part work with the medications that are available to them. So more times than none we tell people that drug therapy should be the last resort. When people come into my drugstore, I tell them: let's look for ways where we can actually make you avoid taking the medication if we can. Medications are chemicals that are used in special circumstances. They shouldn't be given out willy-nilly, if you will.

Mr. Speaker, I know that when this bill was introduced for first reading, the hon. minister of health was interviewed. He was approached by the media, asking him what he thinks of this bill and where he stands on it. I know that he actually said – and I'm not quoting, but I know that he referenced his preference – that treatment in the community should really translate into a better quality of life for Albertans. Albertans with mental health issues are still

citizens, and they still have rights, and they still have expectations that should be met. So the minister indicated that it really should reflect in a better quality of life.

5:20

It's my interpretation as a layman, again, that community treatment orders should not be a punishment. They should not be a restraint for people just because, you know, at one point there was a chemical imbalance in their brain and they misbehaved. We can argue about the definition of misbehaviour. Mental illness is no different from diabetes, Mr. Speaker. Diabetes is a chemical illness where the body is unable to burn off sugar, for example. Mental illness is also a chemical instability in the brain, and these patients are not aggressive by nature. They don't enjoy being aggressive. They actually have the same feelings as everyone else. It's just unfortunate that their chemical imbalance happened in their brain, that it didn't happen in their liver or kidneys or their appendix or, you know, their pancreas.

I was enlightened by the comment that quality of life should be a big thing that is central to this discussion. The minister also indicated that while community treatment orders are an important tool that will, you know, likely encourage compliance with medication and prescribed treatment, they should also be a measure of last resort. I am really happy that the minister shares this philosophy, that it shouldn't be the norm; it should be an exception. He indicated that one of his priorities now that he's the minister of health would be to ensure the availability of the support services that are required for mental health patients in the communities to lead full, independent, and productive lives.

I genuinely hope, Mr. Speaker, that this will translate into action, that words would now be reflected in government policy. And it's government policy that I'm hoping would create more treatment beds in the community, government policy that would help recruit and retrain more qualified psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses in the community. It might be government policy that would work with drug companies, for example, to encourage better medications, medications of the future, that have fewer side effects and that are not as detrimental to somebody.

With your permission I will carry on at a later time. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) a five-minute comment and question period is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. This bill highlights removing the requirement for a physician to prove that an individual is dangerous in order to be hospitalized, creates community treatment orders that require patients to stay on medication and follow medical advice in order to prevent hospitalization. If patients don't comply, police officers are able to apprehend them and bring them back to the hospital for up to 30 days. These community treatment orders, CTOs, refer to a legal process whereby certain people designated as mentally ill may be forced to comply with the physician's ordered treatment plans while living outside hospital. Those who do not comply may be returned to hospital for psychiatric assessment and possible admission.

Mr. Speaker, I'm still not sure. This is a very difficult decision for me to make because this bill is, you know, so controversial. It's very hard for me to make a decision at this moment. I will listen to some other speakers, but at this moment I just want to comment on a few more things.

Adequate supports, like I said, must be established within communities for both the mentally ill and their families. A system that offers voluntary preventative services within the community and puts the individual at the centre of the decision-making process is the most effective way of dealing with mental illness.

While improvements to the current system are needed, there are cases both for and against the proposed community treatment orders. This is a complex issue and has its supporters and opponents. While CTOs are intended to provide a more structured approach to treatment, there is a legal and ethical dilemma of potentially violating a patient's rights as well as the inconsistency with today's medical philosophy around the right to refuse treatment, evidence-based decision-making, and the use of the least invasive alternative. This issue, Mr. Speaker, has been the subject of healthy debate within our caucus, and the health critic has recommended a free vote, where each member will vote based on their own opinions and the wishes of their constituents.

The Schizophrenia Society of Alberta has been advocating for Alberta to adopt community treatment orders and has recently launched a campaign targeting MLAs. The health minister fully supports CTOs and believes that they are an important tool for families dealing with mental illness. Other jurisdictions, including Ontario, B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, 41 American states, New Zealand, and Australia, have some form of legislated compulsory community treatment. Some jurisdictions, like New Brunswick, have considered and rejected legislating CTOs, choosing to concentrate on developing community services and supports instead.

I have a few questions, Mr. Speaker. The first one I'll start with: why was the decision made to expand the category of people who are eligible for community treatment orders from a person who presents a danger to others to a person who is "likely to cause harm . . . or to suffer substantial mental or physical deterioration or serious physical impairment"? Why not limit it to schizophrenia or psychiatric illness? Who made the decision to include serious physical impairment? Is Alberta using the same criteria as other provinces?

What studies were used to determine the effectiveness of CTOs over other forms of treatment? What additional community supports and services are going to be put in place to ensure that CTOs have a chance at being effective? What is the government doing to make better drugs with fewer side effects available so people with mental illness aren't so inclined to resist them? How does this government imagine CTOs working in rural communities where there are shortages of mental health staff, including psychiatrists? In other jurisdictions physicians are required to demonstrate that the treatment plan proposed is the least restrictive alternative. Why was that excluded from the legislation?

CTOs are a useful tool to help families of individuals with mental illness access early intervention and, hopefully, prevent deterioration. Some mental health professionals compare severe mental illness with Alzheimer's disease, which also affects the ability to reason. They feel that they have the responsibility to care for patients who may not understand the importance of treatment or are unable to care for themselves. Involuntary hospitalization is the last option, not the first. It's only used when a community treatment order is not complied with.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, you know, I'm still not sure whether I'm going to support this bill or not. I would move that we adjourn the debate. [interjections] You want to speak? Okay. Sorry.

I'm still not sure. I would like to listen to some other speakers for some valuable points.

Thank you.

5:30

**The Deputy Speaker:** You're not adjourning debate, so Standing

Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone that wants to rise for a five-minute period of questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've listened with great interest to the debate this afternoon on Bill 31. I heard from members from all over the province in regard to the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. Certainly, it has been one of the more interesting discussions in this session that I have had the opportunity to listen to from all hon. members. I appreciate the opinions that were expressed.

Now, I have heard from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar on this matter going back to January of 2007. I've had e-mails. I've had personal visits to the constituency. I've had letters from families who are directly affected by a mental illness. Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the whole issue of mental illness, the effect that it has on the family or on the community is significant. This legislation, although not perfect, I think merits support.

Certainly, we have people from the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta who have been advocating for Alberta to adopt the community treatment orders, and I know that they have had discussions with several members of this House. When you look at how some of these individuals who are unfortunately stricken with schizophrenia or any other mental illness have to deal with their illness, it's sad. It's deplorable. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is absolutely right when she talks about the need to look after and to support and to guide members of our community who have a mental illness.

But this, in my view, is a measure of last resort. When I talk to constituents from Edmonton-Gold Bar and their families, they are anxious to see this legislation proceed because, not in all cases but certainly in some cases, it will help the families. It will help those who are affected by the illness and those who are very worried about their personal safety. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly encourage all members of this House to reflect on this bill. Although it may not be perfect, it certainly is worthy of support. I don't think it will jeopardize anyone's rights.

The hon. member earlier talked about rights. Well, property owners, individuals in the community, they, too, have rights, and he's absolutely correct. There is an unfortunate occurrence in many communities in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar where one individual with Tourette's at early hours of the morning and the late hours of the evening is going up and down the street and in the back alleys. It's through no fault of their own, but they have uncontrollable verbal outbursts, and this individual certainly needs help. Whether this community treatment order system will help that individual remains to be seen, but the hon. member is absolutely right that other people also are directly affected by those actions, and hopefully this will help.

In conclusion, again, the visitors from the constituency to our office have indicated that they would prefer this bill to become law. We have to listen to the constituents, and in this case I will certainly be supporting Bill 31 because constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar have requested that they would like to see this bill become law.

Thank you.

I would also like to adjourn debate, please, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

### Bill 32 Animal Health Act

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and move second reading of Bill 32, the Animal Health Act.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for introducing this bill on my behalf. The Animal Health Act is enabling legislation, Mr. Speaker, that would replace the existing Livestock Diseases Act and regulations, which were created in 1946 to reduce the impact of disease on Alberta's livestock.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have to tell anyone in this House how much things have changed in the last 61 years. New technology, new farming practices, new food products have given a new face to the world of agriculture, and new animal diseases have come right along with the changes as well.

Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons Alberta has been able to achieve such economic success is our ability to adjust and adapt to the world around us. This new act keeps this tradition by allowing us to better accommodate progressive new initiatives with respect to animal health. These include our responses to BSE and avian influenza and our agreement with the federal government on foreign animal disease emergency supports.

The current Livestock Disease Act and regulation does not allow us to react to today's animal health emergencies, Mr. Speaker, or to meet today's animal production and marketing needs. This proposed act will allow Alberta to better prepare for an outbreak of a highly contagious livestock disease and respond to emergency situations quicker and more effectively to protect both animal and human health.

According to the World Health Organization, about 75 per cent of the new diseases that have affected humans over the past 10 years have been caused by pathogens that come from an animal or products of animal origin. Many of these diseases have the potential to spread many ways over long distances and to become global problems. That's why now more than ever we need to be prepared for any outbreak of animal disease in Alberta.

This legislation allows us to react quicker and more effectively to a highly contagious disease. Mr. Speaker, this gives us the ability to minimize economic impacts, maintain global market access, and reduce costs to industry and government, and it will minimize the impact on animal and human health.

Animal diseases cost money, Mr. Speaker. Everyone in the province knows just how devastating the outbreak of BSE was to our cattle industry. Billions of dollars in sales were lost, and the government committed over a billion more for industry recovery. What many people don't realize is that BSE is actually a very slow-moving disease. A faster moving disease, such as foot-and-mouth or bird flu, would be far more devastating to our industry here in Alberta.

**5:40**

Mr. Speaker, we have to be prepared. Bill 32, the Animal Health Act, helps us to do just that. Under the new act the chief provincial veterinarian would have greater authority to take action and quarantine facilities in order to limit the spread and outbreak of a reportable disease. A reportable disease is a disease listed under the regulations that farmers must report. When an outbreak occurs, our chief provincial vet can act immediately to control the spread of disease while pinpointing the exact origin of the outbreak.

In the case of a severe outbreak this act allows for the Minister of Agriculture and Food to establish a broad disease control zone, which will provide for more actions to be taken to control the outbreak. Previously this was done through a cabinet order, which could delay the reaction time needed to properly control a disease outbreak. Any delays in the first few days or even hours of a disease

outbreak can have a damaging long-term effect on our livestock industry. Mr. Speaker, we have seen enough devastation to our industry from livestock disease. It is the intention of this act to help prevent us going through any more.

Mr. Speaker, another major goal of this new legislation is to expand the definition of disease to include those that aren't caused by organisms or viruses or bacteria. Under the current legislation if there was cannibalism in pigs, for instance, or when cows have eaten toxic substances such as lead, we did not have the authority to keep these animals out of the animal or human food system. We did manage to keep them out, but we didn't have the legal authority to do so. This act will give us this authority and allow us to work with industry to remove infected animals earlier in the disease process. This will help us to avoid situations where animal or human health is compromised.

The new Animal Health Act also addresses issues related to compensation following the outbreak of an animal disease. Mr. Speaker, we want Alberta's ranchers to be doing everything they can to increase animal health and food safety on their farms. While we agree that fair compensation should be given in the event of a disease outbreak, the public should not be subsidizing producers for poor safety and animal health practices. This act allows the minister to authorize compensation for animals destroyed or for the cost of destruction, disposal, cleaning, and disinfecting. To be eligible, conditions would include compliance with the act and effective biosecurity measures. The manner and amount of payment will be set out later in the regulations.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most important lessons we learned from BSE is to be prepared so we can properly respond to an outbreak. Having the right information in the hands of the right people at the right time can mean the difference between keeping trade borders open and having trade grind to a halt.

This act helps us to get information in the hands of the right people. It allows us to gain better access to records of the numbers and locations of animals through an enhanced traceability system. This will allow us to ensure that we can complement the federal system in a way that makes sense for Alberta. We want to do our part to contribute to a truly national traceability system with industry, federal, and provincial elements. This new legislation will allow us to do just that. In order to play our role in this partnership, we will need further consultation with industry to make a system that works for everyone involved. One of the key steps in doing this is initiating a premises identification system. This is one of the three pillars of the national food traceability system and will allow us to better prepare for and respond to emergency outbreaks.

The other two pillars are animal or product identification and animal or product movement. Enhancing our all-around traceability system will be key in maintaining our current trade markets, opening new markets, and ensuring the quality and safety of our food products. Our ability to trace our food products from the dinner plate to the barn or corral is no longer a luxury, Mr. Speaker. It is a necessity in order to maintain our current market access and to expand on it.

This act will define what farm animal records are to be created, maintained, and made available to the provincial vet in the event of a reportable disease. Mr. Speaker, farmers may have concerns about the access to this information, and I would like to assure them that Alberta Agriculture and Food respects the intent of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. But we have taken added measures to ensure that this information is protected appropriately and used only when necessary to protect public and animal health.

We now know how important it is to have timely, accurate, and full information. If we can't quickly pinpoint where an outbreak started, it can cost the industry and the government millions if indeed not billions of dollars through the lost access to markets and expensive compensation programs.

**An Hon. Member:** How much?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Yes, billions of dollars.

This act helps to safeguard us against this occurring again.

This act also outlines the different levels of authority for enforcement, including giving inspectors the authority to examine records to trace movement of affected and potentially affected animals and animal products as part of disease control measures, giving the minister the authority to seize and destroy livestock that are a threat to public and animal health, allowing the chief provincial veterinarian to order the destruction of animals with a reportable disease, allowing the chief provincial veterinarian to order the destruction of a vehicle, material, or equipment that cannot be cleaned or disinfected adequately, providing authority to the minister to compensate owners for animals or property ordered destroyed, authorizing the chief provincial veterinarian to search vehicles transporting animals without a warrant to see if a reportable disease is present, and authorizing the minister to prohibit the possession of imported animals that may carry or have been exposed to a specific reportable disease.

This is a major piece of legislation, and we know that it is going to have a substantial effect on the ranchers and farmers in our province. Therefore, we made sure we did substantial consultation with industry before bringing this bill forward. In fact, Mr. Speaker, a review of the current act has been under way for several years in preparation for this bill in the Legislature, and during this time we've worked closely with key provincial commodity groups, animal health stakeholders, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Sustainable Resource Development, and Alberta Health and Wellness. This legislation reflects the range of input we received during these consultations, and since this is enabling legislation, we will continue to work with stakeholders during the regulation process to address the other concerns. We have developed a process to consult with industry stakeholders during the development of regulations, including a planned multistakeholder meeting in mid-June of 2007.

Mr. Speaker, life on the farm is changing, now maybe more than ever before. Farms are businesses and need to be run as such, and we need to reflect this change in our legislation. We need to meet ever-increasing demands for food safety and to continue to stay competitive in a global market. Both of these goals rely on our ability to protect and ensure animal and human health and our ability to demonstrate that we have proper traceability systems in place working effectively.

Many of our provincial counterparts have already updated their animal health legislation. The federal government has also passed a detailed legislation on this matter. Mr. Speaker, I feel that this legislation will put Alberta at the forefront again with regard to our legislation, and that is why I am certainly encouraging all members of this House to give their full support to Bill 32.

Thank you.

5:50

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 32, the Animal Health Act, certainly repeals and replaces the Livestock Diseases

Act, updates the definition of reportable diseases, and as the hon. minister indicated, empowers the chief provincial veterinarian to issue quarantine orders, establish surveillance zones and control zones to contain a reportable disease.

The hon. minister also mentioned the new restrictions around the sale and the possession of animals with specific reportable diseases. He gave a brief history of the proposed Animal Health Act and the repeal and the replacement of the Livestock Diseases Act that was created after the Second World War, and the department has provided us on this side of the House with a brief outlining the key provisions of the Animal Health Act. We appreciate that and would like to be on the record of expressing our gratitude to the hon. minister for that.

This legislation is, in my view, a major piece of legislation, and it warrants a detailed examination in the House at this time. I have some questions that hopefully we can get answered through the course of debate. My first question for the minister in regard to Bill 32 would be – and I just heard him give a brief outline of the stakeholders that have been consulted – what does the Privacy Commissioner think of the provision in this legislation? For example, the Animal Health Act will have paramountcy over section 17(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which deals with the release of information related to public health and safety, and section 17(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act deals with the disclosure harmful to personal privacy. Has the commissioner been consulted in regard to this? If he has, what did he say in regard to this particular provision? I don't know if that is necessary, and that is one of the reasons why I certainly at this time would be cautious of this legislation.

Now, the hon. minister talked about the avian flu, and I believe he's absolutely right. Alberta is located on a major flyway for migratory birds in the spring and again in the fall, and I would like to know if that 10-kilometre zone is considered adequate at this time. I want to get my questions on the record here if you don't mind, Mr. Speaker.

Now, in the definitions in this act under section 1(b) we're including a lot of animals there and "any other animal prescribed in the regulations." Are bees going to be prescribed in the regulations? Now, hopefully, it's not something that's going to be a big issue here in this province, but there has been a significant decline in the number of colonies of bees in the lower 48 states and in some parts of British Columbia and in some parts of Ontario. As I understand it, there has been a significant winterkill. There are still discussions and debates as to how this occurred, but the bees are responsible for the harvest and the size of the harvest. There's a direct relationship there. Since I don't see any definition here under "animal" – I've had a look – is it proposed that they be in the regulations? This is, I think, significant.

Hopefully, we're not going to have the problems in Alberta. Some newspapers are reporting that we do, but hopefully we're not. How does the beekeeping industry fit into this legislation under the Animal Health Act, and have they been consulted about this? Unfortunately, we have a habit of overlooking the importance of bees to the agricultural sector.

Now, we can go through this legislation, Mr. Speaker, but overall I think the government is working hard to improve this specific piece of legislation. But I'm very cautious about the override here for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. As the Minister of Energy knows full well, I have every reason to be cautious because the minister, you know, is dealing with barrels over there, but in his case he's dealing with barrels of whiteout, not oil, because he's whiting out so much of the information that should be

provided in routine disclosures. So not only is he the Minister of Energy; he's the minister of whiteout, and he uses a lot of it. I just want to make sure that this provision to override section 17(2)(b) is justified. I cannot see the need for this in this legislation. Perhaps there's a valid reason that the minister can explain.

Mr. Speaker, getting back to other provisions of this bill, the main impact, as the hon. minister has stated, is to provide a more detailed, updated statute to deal with animal health issues as they arise in Alberta. I believe that the bill will facilitate a more effective and efficient process for dealing with animal health emergencies. At this time I would support it with caution, but certainly I'm going to have a look at the answers as they're provided. Again, it is noted that this bill does not appear to be controversial or contentious, but we have to be very, very careful about giving this act an override on the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I still don't understand why we need this.

Now, the minister talked earlier about animal health issues and

how they have gained national and international attention over the last several years. Most notably for Alberta farmers has been the unfortunate discovery of BSE in their cattle herds. The discovery of BSE in Canadian cattle has led to severe trade restrictions that have had an enormous detrimental economic impact on the beef industry. It is recovering, but it is quite slow. You know, the packing industry has been concentrated in the hands of two outfits, and I don't think that that's in our long-term best interests.

Other animal health issues that continue to garner national and international attention include anthrax and chronic wasting disease. I think we can add to that the whole issue of the winterkill of the bees south of the border.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

