

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, February 28, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/02/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed a pleasure to introduce today to the House a constituent of mine. Mr. Larry Marcotte is an amateur writer who has written a book and recently has presented it to our Premier. I understand that the Premier actually quite enjoyed reading the book. Today is his second visit to our Legislature, and I would like to ask all members to extend our traditional warm welcome to Mr. Marcotte. I'd ask Mr. Marcotte to rise as well.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly 53 of the very brightest young people that this province has to offer along with some teachers and parents. They are from Our Lady of Victories school in Edmonton-Riverview, and they are, I believe, seated in the public gallery. The students are accompanied by Mrs. Lorraine Williamson, Mr. Mike Marr, Mrs. Christine Engley, Ms Corinne Didrikson-Law, and Mrs. Kathy Crowell. I would ask these students from Our Lady of Victories to rise and to receive the warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a group of 37 students from St. Mark junior high school in the riding of Edmonton-Glenora. They are accompanied by their teachers Mr. Lawrence Allarie and Miss Antoinette Falcone, and with them also are Mrs. Stella Gluwchynski, Mr. Joe Simons, and Mrs. Kathryn Hughes. I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to the rest of the Assembly today several members of the rural community who have been impacted by coal-bed methane in their areas, and I would ask them to rise as I introduce them. The first is Mr. Karl Zajec with the Surface Rights Federation in Warburg, Ms Jessica Ernst, Ms Fiona Lauridsen, Mrs. Brenda Zimmerman, and Mr. Dale Zimmerman. I'd ask all the members to give them a round of welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're joined in the gallery today by my oldest son, Craig. I would like all hon. members to show him the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to be able to stand today and introduce 20 employees of the Department of Energy that work on the gas royalty calculations. This is the group that's making sure that we bring in all of those royalties, that we receive our fair share. This year we had over \$14 billion of energy revenues come in. They are part of the group that help us facilitate that happening day in and day out. So I'd them if they'd please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Health Care Privatization

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is hell-bent on driving through bad health policy. Despite warnings from inside and outside the province that private health delivery increases costs and decreases the quality of health care delivery, this government pushes ahead blinded by ideology. Make no mistake; this is the Premier's way for health. My questions are to the Premier. In fact, another math question for the Premier: when you have two doctors handling the demand for public care and you allow one doctor to leave to take on the demand of private care, how many doctors do you have left taking care of the public queue?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is the subject of the consultation. I would invite the Liberal opposition to phone the minister, sit down with the minister, and provide the minister with their ideas. I haven't heard any of their ideas yet. Now, there will be a whole month available, and if they can't say it in five minutes, there's something wrong with their ability to communicate because anyone should be able to say anything in five minutes. That's a long, long time. So if they have any good ideas, let us know.

Mr. Taylor: Fifteen seconds.

Mr. Klein: Fifteen seconds. There's the guy from radio. He knows what 15 seconds is all about. It's good. Fifteen seconds is good.

So, Mr. Speaker, if they have any ideas, phone the minister, sit down with the minister, and communicate those ideas.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then to the Minister of Health and Wellness, who I hope will give some straight answers here: how will this minister explain to a small child why her mother has to wait months for a knee replacement while the wealthy mother of a classmate can get the same surgery in weeks?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think it's unprecedented in Canada that a government has invested, as we have, \$20 million into the hip and knee replacement project, has created a tremendous amount of access, improved access, to health care. In the third-quarter announcement by the Minister of Finance we announced even more

dollars that would be available for improving access, expanding that project, and looking at both the breast cancer and prostate cancer issues as well as mental health. So no matter what happens with anybody who chooses to deliver private care, this government stands for improving a strong public health care system.

Dr. Taft: Again to the minister: if you stand for improving the public health system, why don't you just improve the public health system instead of dismantling it? This is a disastrous policy.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, since last year, since the Chaoulli decision in Quebec . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair has recognized a question from one and has recognized someone to answer the question. We're going to have civility, and we're going to have good manners. I've recognized the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Canadians have recognized since last June, when the Chaoulli decision rendered a decision that said that a Quebecer should not be stopped from buying private insurance in order to be able to make a choice on their own behalf for something that can enable them to look after their own health care needs in their own way – for me and for many other Canadians it raised the spectre of what, in fact, could be purchased with private insurance, and should we stop people in Canada from accessing or making individual choices based on their perception of their choice and their want?

Mr. Speaker, this health care system will always be here for people who need it, but people who want it in an accelerated fashion should have an opportunity of choice, and I would suggest that they shouldn't just have to buy private insurance and purchase that service in Quebec.

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

1:40 Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's Water Act clearly states that it's the duty of the government to "manage . . . water resources to sustain our environment and to ensure a healthy environment and high quality of life." However, due to the rapid expansion of coal-bed methane operations in Alberta our water quality is quite literally coming under fire. If you doubt this, just ask Dale and Brenda Zimmerman, Jessica Ernst, and Fiona Lauridsen, three Albertans who used to have safe water to drink but after coal-bed methane activities near their property now have water so contaminated that even their livestock refuses to drink it. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Does the minister deny that our drinking water is threatened by shallow fracturing operations?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, in this province we've been drilling for natural gas for – I don't know – decades. It's been certainly 50-plus years where we've had a substantive amount of activity in the regulation of oil and gas activity. It's true that there is methane in lots of seams throughout this province, sometimes in our wells and so forth, but they're not all related to the drilling activity. What is true, though, is that we have a very thorough, excellent regulatory regime, of which the Energy and Utilities Board heads up the regulatory function, to which those things can be adjudicated. Very important in all these issues, despite any assertions, is that they be fact based. It is very much in the interest of the development of this

industry that we get to and ensure the safety of the water supply. So, yes, we do support the safe development of all of the oil and gas activity in this province, and they're doing an excellent job.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that published industry reports have said that it takes just one part per million of methane to make water at risk of explosion, can the minister deny that Dale Zimmerman's water's methane content of 75,800 parts per million poses an immediate risk to his family, his home, and his livestock?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I've not had the opportunity myself to ever receive such information, so I don't know how to respond to just an assertion. It is very important that we do take these things very seriously. We'd be happy to receive that information. We'd be more than happy to ensure that the Energy and Utilities Board, who are the experts in these matters, who can ensure that the appropriate regulation and the appropriate enforcement happens if any problem occurs – so I'd be happy to receive that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister's department has received submissions and information for months on this issue, will this minister spend a week drinking and bathing in the water from the wells in question? Put your money where your mouth is.

The Speaker: This is really not Stampede Wrestling. The hon. minister?

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The coal-bed methane industry is rapidly developing across Alberta, yet while this increased production is occurring, this government has failed to adequately legislate regulations around CBM drilling and fracturing that protect water wells, that test water wells before they're fractured. Because of this lack of accountability from government and industry some Albertans, including those in the Assembly today, are living with contaminated water that contains methane levels so high that they can now ignite their tap water. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Given that the minister stated yesterday in the House that he does not support CBM activities without adequate water protection and regulations, will he decisively respond to concerns of the Zimmermans, Ms Ernst, Ms Lauridsen, and all other Albertans affected by CBM operations right now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question because it is a very serious and a very important issue, that all Albertans enjoy safe drinking water. I think what is also equally important is that since we were first notified in October by some of the families that you've mentioned, we've been working very closely with them as Alberta Environment in terms of looking at alternative water options for them. We're committed to doing that, as we've indicated to them.

Also, it's important as we go forward to develop a baseline of information in terms of what the impact is from drilling and also what the impact is from the natural flow of methane that, of course,

takes place based on how this world has been created. So my commitment in terms of working with the families when it was first brought to our attention: we're doing that. I'm actually looking forward to recommendations very quickly in the future that will be going to the EUB relative to the issue of how we go forward regarding automatic baseline testing for what the hon. member has brought up.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Minister, some of these individuals have been calling since October and are not getting return calls from your department. Can you explain that and why they are paying for their own bulk transport of water?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate to the hon. member and to the families that are here today: it is a very serious issue. As Alberta Environment I will use every fibre of energy in my body to assist this family relative to safe drinking water now and into the future. I'm not aware of any returned phone call, but I can assure you that we are working with them and we will continue to work with them because this is a very important issue to this family and to many other families that have been impacted, be it by the natural flow or because of what is being asserted relative to what is taking place in the water supply.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Minister, this is an urgent public health and safety issue. Will you support a moratorium/cessation of all shallow fracturing of coal now?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, at this point in time I can say no, but let me be very specific on why I say no. Number one, we are working with the families to get them safe drinking water. Number two, we want to develop a baseline of information relative to whether this is naturally occurring or whether this is the result of drilling, that the hon. member has described. As we go forward, I anticipate that there will be a baseline requirement relative to determining the questions that the hon. member is mentioning.

In the meantime, I'm using my energy to get these people safe drinking water. We will do everything in our power to get them that, and then we can come to conclusive evidence in terms of: is it naturally flowing, or is it the result of drilling? I don't have that answer as of yet, but it's a very important question that we are committed to getting the answer to very quickly on the recommendations that I've made reference to.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the last provincial election the Premier said that an election was not the time to talk about health care policy: shades of Kim Campbell. He promised to consult with Albertans before the government made any clear health care plans, and that has not happened. My question is to the Premier. Why did you tell the people of Alberta during the last election that you would consult with them on health care before making a decision, and why did you not keep your promise?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness held a news conference today – and I don't know if the hon. leader of the third party or the hon. Leader of the Opposition was there, but certainly they could have been if they wanted to – where she

outlined the public consultation process that will take place over the next month.

An Hon. Member: A month?

Mr. Klein: A month. As I said, if the mouth over here can't say what he means in five minutes, then there is something wrong with his communication skills.

Mr. Martin: Five minutes is a long time for you.

Mr. Klein: Five minutes? I can say it in 15 seconds. I'm used to it. You know, the minister will begin the consultations immediately. As I said, there are 15 seconds. If they have any good ideas, send them over.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the government has already decided that there's going to be opting out of the health care system by physicians, that there's going to be private insurance, that there's going to be private delivery, what consultation is the Premier trying to convince us is going to take place? It's already decided.

1:50

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that's our idea for the time being, but if they have any better ideas, send them over.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, during the television debate during the election I asked the Premier whether or not they had a plan for privatizing health care in this province, and he denied it. Why didn't he tell the people the truth?

Mr. Klein: That is the truth, Mr. Speaker: there was no plan at that particular time. I did say that health care costs are out of line. Ask his cousins in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. You know, ask Shirley Douglas. Ask Premier Calvert, and ask Premier Doer. Ask the health ministers in those provinces. Health care costs are getting out of line.

An Hon. Member: Tell the truth.

Mr. Klein: No, they won't tell the truth, Mr. Speaker. They won't tell the truth. They won't talk about health care costs going up between 9 and 20 per cent.

An Hon. Member: Is that a hundred billion again?

Mr. Klein: No. I'm sorry. It's \$1.6 billion, Mr. Speaker. They don't think that's much money. It's peanuts to them because their solution is to spend, spend, spend, and spend more.

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

Health Care Insurance for the Disabled

Mr. Louheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Persons with disabilities have expressed concern that they'll be unable to purchase private insurance to cover nonemergency procedures because they have pre-existing conditions. If private health and medication insurance is made available, will persons with disabilities be disadvantaged by not being able to access the insurance or by having to pay higher premiums?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we are still doing considerable work or, rather, our department officials are still working with Aon to analyze and do actuarial positioning and modelling of what it would look like if insurance was offered for service.

The thing that I want to stress is that we are not making any decision about insurance with this consultation document. That would be something we would bring to Albertans at a later time. What we are talking about in this document is making sure that Albertans know that they always have a public health care system they can count on when they need it. People with disabilities, with a pre-existing condition that have medical needs will get those needs, and they will not have to depend on accessing insurance to get those needs. Our Premier has said that your access to the public health care system will not be based on your ability to pay. Today, Mr. Speaker, this document is for consultation, and I look forward to hearing from all Albertans. When they need that system, they'll get it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental to the same minister: because persons with disabilities often have compromised systems and may require immediate surgery for a problem that other Albertans would consider nonemergent, will their unique circumstances be considered?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. It would be a point, obviously, that the doctor would evaluate. If it's that necessary, they would get that service. People who spend a long time, for example, in a wheelchair or in other devices have pressure points. For them a sore is a very nasty indicator of immediate need, and they would get that surgery or that kind of medical treatment right away without having to wait. That's quite different from a person who has a wound who is healthy and well and doesn't have some of those neurological or other physical impediments.

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

Health Care Reform (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the minister of health. Given that the minister told reporters at last spring's Health Symposium that, quote, there's no plan to privatize parts of the system, absolutely none whatsoever, end quote, can the minister outline what evidence she's received since then that has caused her to change her mind completely?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this is not about a change of mind. This is about looking to the future, about what options are available to make this system more responsive to Albertans, to provide Albertans choice, and to provide Albertans an opportunity to gain options of service, if they want them, at a more rapid rate than the public can provide.

Mr. Speaker, although I've heard people from the opposite side deny this, it's very clear to me that after the Chaoulli decision there's a need for every government across this country to look at exactly what that decision will mean in the future because of the opportunity it suggests, that to purchase private insurance gives you the full option as an individual to access care at your discretion when you need it. We wouldn't be talking about these things, but the high and rising cost of health care has meant that we've had to restrict

services in areas, put caps on things like ophthalmology, like hips and knees. For those services we have long waiting lists, that take over a year. For some people this is just not a reasonable assumption.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how does allowing private doctors to cream off the easiest surgeries for ready cash and dump the complicated, expensive cases in the public system make the public system more affordable or more efficient?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have read our document thoroughly. It is a document for public consultation. It does not say that we're allowing people to cream off anything. It says: under very controlled conditions, with a business case. We are searching for a middle ground between public service and private service, enabling some doctors under controlled circumstances for certain procedures to provide a business plan which can be evaluated on two bases: first, that it not compromise the public health care system and, secondly, that it fulfill a need for building capacity where we need it. That is the very clear outline for what we are suggesting if doctors should work in both systems.

Mr. Speaker, there's one more important issue. In Quebec they have the luxury of gathering people from other parts of the country from a much higher population base, so they can have doctors that work in two systems, some in the public and some in the private. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member is recognized.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the minister of health: given that the stakeholders, the opposition, and the public have all advocated for public consultations, more than just a survey on a website, why did you decide against conducting the public consultations, as the Premier suggested and promised?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I will be doing a very public consultation. I have already started the consultation with various stakeholder groups. We will have this document available for every Albertan to respond to this government. We will have opportunities in all parts of the province, both in the regions' libraries and, as well, I plan to conduct meetings where it's reasonable to assume that the stakeholders want to have a chance to represent their views to us. Beyond that, in the formulation of regulations after the legislation is passed, we will have a very formalized consultation period on regulations. At this stage, where this is policy, we are expanding on the 13 points listed on the website last July and asking people to continue responding relative to the policies we're putting in place.

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

Health Services for Rural Albertans

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Rural Alberta has always been harnessed with the challenges of sparsity and distance yet having a very high-risk occupation area. Rural health authorities have always struggled to provide equitable services at a cost comparable to their counterparts in urban Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister explain what this government is doing in the proposed plan to improve

access to specialized health services in rural Alberta across the province?

Ms Evans: We will be working on a workforce plan that gives opportunity for specialist services in rural Alberta. Further, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health has the telehealth network, which is one of the largest in the country if not the largest, with 260 sites across the province to support the capacity of rural physicians, something that will make health assessment services easier to gain and improve the diagnosis of patients. I think the telehealth network along with the work that we're doing on a workforce plan and the rural physician action plan will continue to build capacity in rural Alberta.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear about telehealth. My question is in regard to telehealth. Is there going to be an expansion of the telehealth program, or are we building at the same level that we are right now?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that's a good question. We're looking at some expansion in clinical areas, including diagnosing lung cancer, monitoring heart and dialysis patients, and responding to emergencies of a variety in nature hundreds of miles away. We believe that we can expand on the specialized nature of service delivery and that we can improve the local community support network. A good part of this relates to the training and supports we provide. In this policy framework the discussion about interregional co-operation and the use of rural hospitals in partnership with urban hospitals, particularly large urban hospitals, should help us with this task.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental, again to the Minister of Health and Wellness, is in regard to the recruitment, and I specifically say the recruitment of the support professionals such as physiotherapists and speech therapists. Can she tell me how the plan will assist in this manner?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we found particularly challenging with speech therapists is that frequently they tend to go where their partners go, and sometimes communities can lose three speech therapists within a six-month period. That becomes very difficult. So one of the things we're looking at is creating a virtual primary care network where support services for things like speech therapy can be provided from another geographic centre, and we can expand on provision to off-site service delivery under agreements between the two regional health authorities.

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

Child Care System

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government chose to neglect the child care sector for years and only decided to increase its support after receiving funding from Ottawa in 2005. Now with this government's Tory cousins in power the province's child care workers are left wondering if this government will once again abandon them. My first question is for the Deputy Premier. In the Premier's recent meeting with the Prime Minister did he make any attempt to defend Alberta's five-point plan?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has informed us that he had a very, very productive discussion with all of the Premiers from across Canada and the new Prime Minister. Definitely the child care file was discussed. Remember that this was an introductory meeting. It was a very short meeting, but certainly the Premier had the opportunity at that time to reiterate the importance of this subject to Mr. Harper.

Mrs. Mather: To the Minister of Children's Services: what stakeholders has the minister met with since the federal election to discuss how the new federal program could impact on them?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, the department has been very good in regard to trying to get the message out about the changes that the Harper government is proposing. I can tell you that the stakeholders in this province know that at any time they can pick up the phone and that if they want to meet with me, my door is always open.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: if Alberta abandons its five-point plan, what assurances can the minister offer to child care workers that their wages won't return to the levels that the minister herself recognized as insufficient?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that first of all we have to acknowledge that this is a work in progress. We still haven't met with Prime Minister Harper. I'm looking forward to having a meeting with my counterpart next week. We're hearing different scenarios across the country, and I think that it's important as the Minister of Children's Services on behalf of Alberta to give her the courtesy of meeting her in a face-to-face meeting. We have some questions that we need to have answered in regard to the child care plan. I think it's important that we talk about a win-win-win situation for everybody, a win especially for the families and children in this province. There are many questions that need to be answered.

I can tell the hon. member right now that we have received \$70 million from the federal government, and we will be receiving \$66 million next year. We provide approximately \$70 million out of our own budget. We're looking forward to a discussion with my colleague from Ottawa.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Continuing Care Insurance

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer as I travelled around the province on the task force on continuing care with my colleagues from Calgary-Foothills and Lethbridge-East, we heard many concerns from seniors about supportive living, assisted living, continuing care situations, and also nursing home situations. They had some concerns about their ability to continue to access health services, especially under the new proposed health policy framework. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could you explain whether the ministry has undertaken any work on examining whether or not continuing care insurance is an option for Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the preliminary review of the Aon model identifies that continuing care may be in the future – and that's the operative phrase: may be in the future – an area we could look at. I have to advise the hon. member that one thing really concerns me.

Today 10 per cent of Albertans are seniors, and for some of those families it's a struggle today to make sure that we have the right kind of opportunity for them to receive either continuing care in their homes or placement outside their homes. So in the future when we move to about one-third of Albertans being seniors, we're going to be challenged even further to find ways and means. If we were to introduce any type of insurance or health savings plan in the future, it would have to be done with sufficient notice, and it would have to be done with a population that was young enough to see an opportunity to build that for the future.

Mr. Speaker, the discussions so far have been very preliminary. They have been so preliminary that we haven't had a chance to even test any models. I would say to people who are seniors today or people who are in that demographic that they shouldn't fear that anything would be imposed on them as a result of this policy discussion. The first line is putting patients first. We intend to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another question: if we were to have this continuing care insurance, would it actually reduce health care costs for Alberta, for the government?

The Speaker: That's pretty speculative: "if," "would." Try it if you wish.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, you're right that it will take some period of time to tell, and I think that it will have to be balanced in review and discussion of other options and other opportunities. What this document talks about in consultation is: what opportunities would Albertans suggest that might help us to offset costs in the future and make health care sustainable?

Mr. Prins: A further question: will it be necessary for seniors to buy any kind of insurance at all to continue to access the health services that they currently get?

Ms Evans: No, Mr. Speaker. We have made a commitment. We currently do not charge a health care premium to seniors. Seniors today are receiving service in a way that I would imagine that in the foreseeable future they'll be able to receive it.

The one thing we are looking at is that currently in the hospitals in acute care settings we do keep seniors for the purpose of providing the medications because in that hospital setting they receive the medication at no charge. If we could allow them to go home and receive the benefit of living at home and receive the medication at no charge in their home, many would choose to not stay any longer in the hospital but to return and live with their loved ones. It is one of the options we're considering.

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

Strategies for Responsible Gaming

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April of 2004 the government received a report commissioned from researcher Harold Wynne on the effectiveness of the so-called responsible gaming features on VLTs. The report concluded that the responsible gaming features, which the government has bragged about endlessly, did not cause players "to reduce or limit their duration of play or the amount of money they spend," nor did they help the player "keep track of

time and money spent playing the VLTs." In short, the responsible gaming features were deemed not effective. My question is for the Minister of Gaming. Why does the government continue to sell the myth that responsible gaming features are working when this report and many other reports like it prove that they are of little or no value at all?

2:10

Mr. Graydon: Well, you should maybe quote the entire report instead of picking out just the specific paragraphs that suit your favour. Also in that report were some numbers on the awareness, whether people had really paid attention or had even noticed that there were responsible gaming features on these machines. A very, very high percentage of the people said: yes, we know that the phone number is there for AADAC; we know that there's a scrolling on the screen which tells us that we've been at the machine for a certain period of time.

The report also said that they would continue with this research. It's a very preliminary report that was issued last May, but the encouraging thing in that report is that people had noticed what we were trying to do.

Mr. Tougas: To the same minister: why did the Gaming department sit on this report for nearly two years? Is it because you didn't like what was in the report?

Mr. Graydon: I believe the report was and is available on the Internet. We had actually a request – I believe it was a FOIP request – for the report, and we said: it's on the Internet; go ahead and fill your boots.

Mr. Tougas: When will this government institute real controls on gaming machines like slowing the rate of play or cutting back on the hours of operation instead of these cosmetic measures?

Mr. Graydon: I guess that we'd wait for some real proof that the measures that he's talking about are effective. Some other provinces are trying that, but at this point in time they've been unable to say that it's working or not working. Let's do the research and then react on good, positive, solid research.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Child Care System

(continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under an agreement with the previous federal government Alberta is receiving \$489 million over five years for child care. The federal monies are funding long overdue improvements in Alberta's child care system, including increases in the income threshold for child care subsidies, wage supplements for child care workers, and improved accreditation standards for child care centres. The minister has conceded that much. All of these enhancements will be reversed if the Harper government is allowed to get away with tearing up this agreement. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that provinces like Quebec and Manitoba are aggressively protecting their child care programs from the ravages of the Harper neo-con government, why is this government rolling over and playing dead?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, what he's saying isn't true; I'm sorry to say that. This government has been very, very aggressive

in regard to doing what Albertans wanted when we started negotiating with the federal Liberals. We are as of right now business as usual. As I explained earlier, we have \$70 million from the federal government this year. We have \$66 million next year. We currently have in our own provincial budget that we are using for child care another \$70 million.

There are lots of questions that I need to ask my federal counterpart about many, many issues in regard to the child care that they're proposing, including a hundred million dollars on an aboriginal initiative, a hundred million dollars that was part of a data strategy. I'm meeting with the federal minister next week. I can tell you one thing: this minister and our government isn't rolling over for anybody.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister stand up to her federal cousins in Ottawa and tell her counterpart next week and demand from her that Alberta children are no less equal than children in the provinces of Quebec and Manitoba when it comes to accessing high-quality child care and early childhood development programs?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that this minister stood up against the former minister, Minister Dryden, when we were in negotiations a year ago January. My goal is to go and have a face-to-face with my federal minister, understand exactly what they're proposing, listen to what she has to say, tell her what Alberta does in regard to our five-point plan, and ask her many, many other questions that need to be answered, including the creation of I believe it's 245,000 daycare spaces across this country. As the minister responsible I am going to meet with my federal counterpart. I'm going to listen to her.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say one thing, if I may, please. Albertans endorsed the Harper government in the last federal election overwhelmingly on their platform.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier has already sandbagged his own minister's position on bargaining with the federal government, what are the plans when she meets with the minister next week in Ottawa? How is she going to deal with a weakened position, thanks to the Premier's statement yesterday?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, I don't believe that our Premier has sandbagged anything. The Premier and I had a very good discussion before he went to Ottawa. Again, Mr. Speaker, I think the position for me at this particular time is to listen to what the federal government has to say, then bring forward Alberta's point of view so she can clearly understand all of the things that we brought forward under this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Health Services for Rural Albertans

(continued)

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across my constituency and, indeed, across the north many communities are facing severe shortages of doctors. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. If we're going to allow doctors to opt out of the public

system to practise in a private system, how can we maintain or improve access to the public system?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one of the things I'd like to say about this hon. member in particular is that he's paid a lot of attention to the issues surrounding the workforce in the north, and it has been very challenging to say the least. We will have to work with each individual health region. We will have to use the health region's sensitivity to the capacity they need before we will make any decision that would enable physicians to move out of communities where we really, desperately need them. We would have to find alternative approaches to delivering with other doctors available to that community.

Mr. Speaker, in our review of this policy I'm hopeful that we'll have some good suggestions about how we enable people to move off the public system into a private system when they want the service and enable us to keep that public system strong for, I would estimate, the 95 or maybe 97 per cent that want us to keep sustaining the public system. So we will not do anything to compromise the capacity for rural Alberta to have proper physicians in place for people that need that care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister: I'm wondering if the establishment of a private system is going to draw doctors out of the north and out of the rural areas, or does the minister envision that private services will be delivered in facilities outside of the major urban centres?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that will depend entirely on what we see coming forward. If you look at the use of some of the rural hospitals, there may be opportunities for rural hospitals to become centres of excellence in delivering a particular type of care, and I think we'd have to look at the business plan that would come forward. There are some of the larger hospitals that may have capacity; some, none at all. So it will depend, quite frankly, on the community in question.

We're looking at a rural physician action plan that will enable us to support through other, alternative arrangements more physicians in rural Alberta, and despite having the shortages that we have faced recently, we've in fact been a leader in successfully recruiting health care professionals. We will continue to build on that, Mr. Speaker. We have a workforce planning committee that's continuing to do that planning so that in the implementation of any of these new policies we're enabling physicians to serve in the north, and at no time do we intend for the public system in the north to be eroded because of any type of alternative approach and delivery.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental again to the same minister: can the minister inform us if there's anything in the policy that was tabled today that in her mind will affect, hopefully positively, the retention and recruitment of doctors in the north?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I want to go through a number of things that will perhaps provide some assurance. The rural family medicine network also offers 60 rural residency positions; 30 of these are in their second year, and I think that that's a positive. The provincial nominee program that we have in place helps to fast-track highly skilled health employees. Since April 2002 the program has placed 190 foreign-trained physicians and health care professionals in rural

areas. We'll continue to build on that, and talking about using our health force wisely and expanding the scope of professionals in policy number 2 is a part of it. Last fall the medical school bursary program began funding programs for 10 new students from rural areas for tuition. We'll continue to build on that program, and since 2000 we have increased the number of physicians in the province by about 20.5 per cent.

2:20

That isn't to say that we can't do better. That isn't to say that we won't get good ideas in this health policy framework to continue building on that, and, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to receiving more ideas about how we can build our physician numbers to serve the north.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Professional Organization for School Principals

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday the Education minister justified his series of endless consultations on the Learning Commission recommendations as – I quote from *Hansard* – being “very open and public and transparent,” yet I have a letter from his ministry denying access to 229 pages on the commission recommendations, and I will table that this afternoon. To the Minister of Education: is it the minister's policy to say that he is transparent when the real decision has already been made and it is described in the pages of this report?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the FOIP Act clearly outlines the process for accessing information. I don't, frankly, deal with it, but if there's some particular information that the hon. member wishes to have, just give me a call and I'll see what I can do for you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you have talked about this report publicly, why won't you make it available immediately to all Albertans and the ATA?

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm not even sure I have a copy of the report that he's talking about at this minute, but perhaps he can just refresh my memory of it. If he's talking about recommendation 78, which deals with principals in or out of the ATA, I just sent an e-mail around to school board chairs indicating where things were at with respect to that and that we would be engaging in yet additional consultations during the month of March because this is a highly, highly contentious issue. The point of requiring principals to withdraw from the ATA or not has serious implications on the system.

Now, government did accept the initial recommendation and also indicated that it would appoint an individual to tour the province, talk with principals and other stakeholders. That has been done. The information has come back, and now it's being analyzed, Mr. Speaker, for its implications on things like infrastructure and school space, things like teaching and whether or not a significant number of principals are also teaching part-time, and if they were displaced from that, what the cost implications would be to hiring new teachers to replace them and so on. It's a very, very complicated issue, but if the member would like to chat further about it, I'm always available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Should Albertans assume your policies are already decided on this matter and the so-called consultation is really just an excuse, or are you suffering from decision paralysis?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, there are about three questions there. Take any one.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'll answer all of them, Mr. Speaker, because I'm just in that kind of mood. All joking aside, however, I think I've already indicated that this issue did get significant time from our government and also from the gentlemen and the committee members that my predecessor appointed who had the incredible task of travelling virtually the entire province, meeting with all the stakeholders they possibly could meet with, and I've met with them as well. I've listened to their presentation, and quite frankly there are a number of good positions to be taken for the decision to be made to remove principals from the ATA, and there are an equal number of good reasons to not do that.

Now, what we have said in response and have been very clear about is that in the month of March, which starts, according to my calendar, tomorrow, we will engage in the final round of consultations on this process, and we hope to bring the matter to a conclusion one way or the other.

I might just add this one final point, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of issues on the education plate at the moment, and we have to be very careful to slow down where we must some of those initiatives and speed up others where we can.

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

Flexibility in Physicians' Scope of Practice

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. The health policy framework announced today talks about going to a different model of primary care. One of my constituents recently told me he'd have to wait five months for a physical from his family doctor. The framework proposes that the next time I need to go see my family doctor, it might not be my doctor I see. Does this mean that under this new framework I won't get to see a doctor if that's my preference?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the primary care network provides an opportunity for people to still see their family doctor. That doctor still is their family doctor, but it enables them to also see other physicians or team members that can provide service to the patient when the patient so chooses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What other health care providers can treat me other than my doctor?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, you could find an advanced nurse practitioner. We have physical therapists, we have social workers, and we have mental health therapists in many of these primary care networks. So we look at a blend of professionals, a team of professionals that collaborate in the treatment and can serve the person depending on their needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third supplemental: will my doctor have access to my treatment records?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the intent of our investment in the electronic health records is to make sure that we have a seamless delivery of laboratory tests to support not only the doctor but to make sure that we don't have duplication of those tests. The investment in the third quarter of additional funds will, we hope, accelerate the electronic health record and the opportunity for the physician to use that record, and I think that will help us reduce the costs in the system and make it possible, yes, for this patient to receive that information and the up-to-date treatment necessary.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, shortly I'll call upon the first of a number to participate today in Members' Statements, but in keeping with our practice this year of providing you with historical mementos of the past, I provide you with this quote.

It is not only a privilege but a bounded duty on every member of the house to vote according to his honest convictions and judgment and there is nothing in our rules or constitution that I ever heard of that prevents members from doing so.

This was found in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 3, 1922, and it was provided by a Member of the Legislative Assembly called John Robert Boyle, who was born in Ontario in 1871 and died in Ottawa in 1936.

A barrister and an Edmonton alderman, he was elected to the First Legislative Assembly of Alberta in 1905 in the Sturgeon constituency as a Liberal. In 1909 he was elected by acclamation and was re-elected in 1913 and 1917. Mr. Boyle served as Deputy Speaker from 1906 to 1909, as Minister of Education from 1912 to 1918, and as Attorney General from 1918 to 1921.

In the 1921 general election Mr. Boyle ran in two different constituencies. He was defeated in Sturgeon but elected as one of five members in Edmonton's multimember riding. Mr. Boyle was recognized as Leader of the Opposition from 1922 to 1924, then resigned to accept a judicial appointment in the trial division of the Supreme Court of Alberta. Notably, the village of Boyle is named after him.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon the first of several.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout our province's history Alberta has a reputation for innovation and inspiration in our classrooms. Today I'm pleased to highlight the Alberta initiative for school improvement, also known as AISI, a unique program that sets Alberta apart from other provinces. AISI is a prime example of our government's ongoing commitment to promoting innovation and continuous improvement in student learning. AISI gives school jurisdictions the freedom to explore new ideas in applied settings and the choice of which projects they wish to undertake for local priorities. It challenges school authorities to be innovative and creative and to try research-based approaches in their classrooms.

2:30

AISI encourages partnerships with teachers, parents, administrators, trustees, universities, and government. In my own constituency of Calgary-Shaw we have many wonderful examples of AISI projects, two of which include the distributed learning program offered by the Calgary Catholic school district, which focuses on increasing student engagement, improving high school completion rates by using multimedia resources and digital environments in the

classroom, and the enhancing teacher capacity to improve students' learning program offered by the Calgary board of education, where teachers across the district join in professional learning communities to focus on effective strategies to improve learning and literacy skills in English and French arts programs.

AISI recognizes that one size does not fit all. Educational needs vary across the province, and there are many different ways to accomplish our goals. Since AISI was initiated in 1999, about 1,300 projects have been funded by our government. In the 2005-2006 school year \$70 million has been provided to AISI.

Thank you to everyone who has helped make AISI such a success, yet another demonstration of why Alberta's education system is the best in Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Tori Holmes

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and celebrate an amazing young woman from my constituency. On Thursday, February 23, of this year Tori Holmes of Devon became the first Canadian woman to successfully row across the Atlantic Ocean. She and her companion, Paul Gleeson of Ireland, docked their 23-foot wooden boat, the *Christina*, at Nelson's dockyard in Antigua after nearly 85 days in the open sea.

This couple now joins only 141 courageous people, 14 of whom are women, who have completed the Woodvale Atlantic Rowing Race. The race, which begins at San Sebastian in the Canary Islands, is the most extreme endurance event in the world, covering nearly 3,000 miles of Atlantic Ocean. In addition to challenging their own limits of mental and physical endurance, rowers also face potential gale waves that can reach over two storeys in height.

Not only has this amazing young woman achieved an incredible feat; she has done so with a focus on a larger issue: to raise funds to help support children in the Third World. The couple entered the rowing race in support of Concern, a nondenominational agency currently working in 27 countries across the world. Concern's work focuses on the key areas of humanitarian disasters, long-term development, education, and advocacy.

This race is merely the latest in Tori's humanitarian efforts. After graduating from John Maland high school in Devon, she went to Bangladesh, where she volunteered for Agriteam Canada. She also volunteered for UNICEF in Bangladesh. In 2003 she and Paul cycled across Australia, a trip of 5,000 kilometres, Mr. Speaker, and raised \$400,000 for charity.

I believe that this young lady embodies the best of humanity and the Canadian spirit. Please join me in saluting a great young Albertan.

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

School Utilization Formula

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Schools are the heart of their community. They serve more than a strictly academic function. They are the gathering, the celebrating place for a variety of events from recreation to culture. Closing a school deeply affects everyone in the community, whether or not they have children or grandchildren attending the school.

Where is the motivation for young families to revitalize older communities if there is no school serving as a magnet to draw them in? Ironically, it is the inner-city communities, that this government forces to pay the highest education property taxes, which are frequently the first in line to lose their schools.

Last night concerned parents and community members met at Jerry Potts elementary school, where I began my teaching career in 1971. Potts is one of the many schools on the government-forced CBE closure consideration list. Tomorrow night parents whose children attend the currently overcrowded Varsity Acres elementary school will be put through a similarly frustrating experience. Meetings are also scheduled to determine the fate of students at Brentwood elementary school and Juno Beach Academy.

In total, four Calgary-Varsity constituency schools are going through unnecessary turmoil caused by this government's extremely flawed space utilization formula, which considers hallways as teachable space. Many more schools continue to be closed than opened, a testament to the formula's futility. While locally elected, government-handcuffed trustees bear the brunt of parental frustration and anger over school closures, a seemingly endless succession of regressive education ministers continue to wash their hands of the problems their utilization policies have confounded.

I encourage all parents to contact both government and opposition MLAs to make sure that the all too familiar closure stories are actually being heard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Gerald Côté

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has had a long, proud tradition of excellence in sports. This was shown again in the recent Winter Olympics. This province has produced some of the finest athletes the world has ever seen, and it gives me great pleasure to offer a few words of congratulation in recognition of one of them. Gerald Côté was born and raised in the town of Falher and moved to Edmonton in 1996 to pursue a career in professional dance. He has been extremely successful and is currently the co-owner of Dance Central, the largest dance studio in Edmonton.

He has also recently achieved recognition on the world stage. In December of last year he and his partner Annick Paquet won first place at the North American championships in Las Vegas. This victory paved the way for Mr. Côté and Ms Paquet to compete at the 2006 United Country Western Dance World Championships in Stockholm, Sweden. Competing against 700 other participants, Mr. Côté and his partner performed several flawless routines showcasing several different styles of dance. They performed the waltz, the two-step, the west coast swing, the nightclub two-step, and at the end of the competition they were declared winners in the pro-pro showcase male diamond category.

The drive of Mr. Côté is truly remarkable. He has attained this honour without any sponsorship. He has been motivated solely by his love of dance and his dedication to excellence. As a result of his hard work Mr. Côté has attained the title of world champion, an extremely rare and noteworthy accolade. The personal commitment to excellence shown by Mr. Côté is something that we as Albertans can all aspire to. With his achievements he has joined the ranks of the many Alberta athletes who have brought honour and recognition to our province. In recognition of his victory and overall commitment to athletic excellence I would ask my colleagues to join me in extending my heartfelt congratulations to a truly unique and noteworthy Albertan.

Thank you.

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

Hungária Gala Ball

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about one

of the most elegant social events in Calgary and in Canada, I must say. It's the Hungária Gala Ball. It took place last Saturday at the Westin hotel in Calgary with the attendance of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor and many distinguished guests. I had the honour of representing our Premier at the event, and they told me that it is the largest ever in their 50 years of history. For the last 50 years organized under the sponsorship of the Hungarian Veterans' Association, the Hungária Gala Ball has been a showcase for Hungarian culture in the Canadian community. It is through the tireless efforts of the members of the Hungarian Veterans' Association and many Hungarian cultural groups in Calgary that the gala has become what it is today. The ball's distinct European and Hungarian character adds to the multicultural fabric of Canadian community or Alberta diversity.

After World War II a wave of Hungarians immigrated into Canada. With the help of many existing Hungarian churches as well as Hungarian associations these Hungarians were able to start a new life here in Canada, in Alberta. The former soldiers founded the Hungarian Veterans' Association, the Calgary chapter, under the leadership of Mr. Fülöpp József. The association held annual dinners, followed by a dance, and now it has become the most elegant gala in Calgary and in Alberta, they say, too.

I would like to say thank you to Mr. József and his wife, Ilona Varvizi; Julius Kiss; Tibor Fekete; Dora Magas and her late husband, Istvan Magas; Michael Rose; Alex Poda; and all the members of the wild rose Hungarian cultural group.

Thank you.

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

2:40

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Government has three basic roles: first, to ensure the protection of people and the environment on which we all depend; secondly, to ensure the ethical development of business, human, and material resources; third, to ensure the fair distribution of wealth and benefits to our society. This government has failed in relation to the first two of these, protection of people and the environment and the ethical development of business and resources for the well-being of all.

The experiences of landowners in relation to oil and gas companies increasingly illustrates the degree to which government is willing to let industry map the course of development in this province. This is always touted to be in the public interest, of course, meaning income and jobs. Coal-bed methane is the most recent example which has taken Alberta by storm after a storm of its own in the United States left a much-depleted environment. We are reassured here by our leaders that we have learned the lessons of the U.S. in the Horseshoe Canyon formation of east and central Alberta. Tell that to the citizens of Rosebud, landowners around Wildwood, Beiseker, and Wetaskiwin as they experience their life source, groundwater, being poisoned by methane and drilling fluids, leaving people frightened of explosion, paying the price in human health and animal costs, costs of trucking in water for themselves, and land value in the basement.

This is not possible, you say? The EUB is strictly required to protect all groundwater. Alberta Environment has the Water Act: no person shall cause contamination of water bodies. Convenient for industry: no one can know the groundwater has been contaminated by fracturing superficial coal because it wasn't tested before the drilling.

So many questions: why is there no inventory and monitoring of water wells in the province? Why does industry do the monitoring

of its own activities in relation to the environment? Why, indeed, is there no inventory and plan for groundwater management in 2006?

Government has failed Albertans in the name of facilitating business in its most basic responsibilities to its people: the protection of life and our most precious life support, water. It is time for government to be held accountable, balancing environmental, health, and social values with the economy.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, do you have a petition?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with 83 signatures on it. The petition urges the government of Alberta to “immediately provide funding enabling municipalities and the RCMP to hire 500 additional community police officers.” This brings the total number of signatures to this petition to 238, with plenty more to come.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am submitting a petition on behalf of many concerned Albertans from St. Albert, Edmonton, Siksika, Cluny, Grande Prairie, Rocky Mountain House, and other communities petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to

take measures that will require school boards and schools to eliminate all fees for instructional supplies and materials and general school services, including textbooks, musical instruments, physical education programs, locker rentals, lunch hour supervision and required field trips, and to ensure that schools are not deprived of the resources necessary to offer these programs and services without additional charges to parents or guardians.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, did you want to present something?

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in order to extend a Standing Order 30 which reads as follows: pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the government’s failure to implement or enforce controls on companies engaging in coal-bed methane exploration, which poses an immediate and pressing risk to the health, safety, and livelihoods of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to table a document on behalf of the leader of the NDP opposition. It is an article by respected health policy analyst Michael Rachlis outlining public solutions to wait lists.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ve got two documents to

table today. The first one is an open letter from the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada addressed to the Prime Minister, and the title of this letter is Code Blue for Child Care. The letter urges federal and provincial governments to honour and extend the agreements on child care agreed to and signed between the two parties last year.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is called The Choice in Child Care Allowance: What You See Is Not What You Get. It’s an analysis prepared by Ken Battle for the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and argues that the proposed child care allowance program will not improve child care and will disproportionately benefit those who need the support least.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling this afternoon, and it is a letter that I would like made available through tablings. It’s dated August 4, 2005, to myself from the hon. Minister of Energy, and I’m disappointed to say that the government will not intervene in the proposed Alberta/Montana tie-line project.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act request 2006-G-0001.

I’d also like to table How to Improve Alberta’s High School Completion Rates put out by the Alberta School Boards Association. It’s an excellent document, and I hope members of the Assembly look into it.

Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to table some documents from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers outlining migration of methane into groundwater and the standards for explosive hazards.

The other tablings have to do with laboratory testing on water in the Wetaskiwin area for gas analysis.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter from Anita Moore, board chair of a recently accredited high-quality, nonprofit daycare program in which she expresses dismay and concern that the new federal Conservative government proposes that it would unilaterally cancel the negotiated national daycare agreement.

The Speaker: I saw other hands, but it was so brief. Is that it? Any others?

I’m pleased to table to the Assembly the annual report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the period April 1, 2004, to March 31, 2005.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document

was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of Mr. Zwodzesky, Minister of Education: response to Written Question 40 asked for by Mr. Bonko on behalf of Mr. Flaherty on November 21, 2005.

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on a submission under Standing Order 30.

Coal-bed Methane

Dr. Swann: Shall I repeat the motion or simply the arguments?

The Speaker: Now it's the argument for urgency.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. Standing Order 30(1) requires the matter to be "of urgent public importance;" 30(7) requires the matter "must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." This stands to reason for an issue cannot really require urgent debate if it is not itself a vitally important issue. *Marleau and Montpetit* on page 588 indicates that consideration should be "given to the importance and specificity of the issue."

Clearly, this matter of contaminated water is of urgent public importance. When tap water can be ignited and can't be used for drinking or bathing, the health and safety of Albertans is at stake. The health and safety of livestock on affected properties are threatened. The survival of many farms and ranches is threatened. This is a genuine emergency, and it calls for our immediate and urgent consideration for landowners from Wetaskiwin to Beiseker to Wildwood and Rosebud.

The issue is also of broader public importance given the extent of current coal-bed methane exploration and the government's intention to extend the scope of exploration. Dealing with these problems is vital to the public interest.

I would also note that *Beauchesne* 387 requires that the matter "be specific" and be within "the administrative competence of the Government." Both conditions are met by this motion. Despite the confusion or conflict between the departments of Energy and the Energy and Utilities Board, Environment, and the department of health, this government does have the power, whether through enforcing existing regulations or developing new ones, to require that the appropriate testing is done and that further exploration be stopped and that families be compensated. Without adequate legislation and action potable water cannot be guaranteed, and more fracturing will occur each day, as we speak.

2:50

It is, as *Marleau and Montpetit* 585 requires, "immediately relevant and of attention and concern" throughout this province. This is an emerging crisis in communities throughout Alberta today. No government action has been taken for six to 18 months in the cases of the families that were here in the House today and in the cases of many others who have not been willing to come forward and speak but have spoken to these families. As far as the urgency of debate I have alluded to some aspects, but in *Beauchesne* 389 it outlines the primary issue is the urgency itself.

I believe that it's necessary to set aside, therefore, the normal business of the day to address this issue. One of the key tests is whether there is another "reasonable opportunity for debate," that is 387, or whether the ordinary rules of the House permit an opportunity to protect the public's interest in having the debate. I do not believe that there is this opportunity in the regular routine of the day. There is no legislation on the Order Paper to indicate that the

government has any intention of dealing with this issue, nor did the Government House Leader in his news conference of February 15 indicate that any related legislation is planned. As far as question period is concerned, as the saying goes: question period is for questions, not for answers.

Furthermore, the authorities clearly indicate that the opportunities should be in the context of a debate. The Committee of Supply debates come up with budget year, and they are a few weeks away. Families and communities affected need reassurance immediately that this issue has been identified by the government and that a response is forthcoming.

Finally, it is vital to the public interest that the public, our bosses, see that we are responsive and capable of delaying routine discussions for matters that are genuinely urgent. *Beauchesne* 389 indicates that the matter "must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer" if not addressed. Together, these arguments indicate clearly that this is so.

Marleau and Montpetit 585 discourages highly partisan issues from being the subject of these emergency debates. There is nothing partisan here. This is about protecting Albertans and a vital resource that we all depend on for life. Many if not all members of this Assembly have constituents who are or may be affected.

To close, Mr. Speaker, we cannot wait for a body count. Citizens, after six to 18 months, have not received diligent and responsible action. I believe this does fall within the meaning conferred by the rule and that it is vital to the public interest that we suspend the ordinary business of the day to have an urgent debate on this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy on the Standing Order 30 application. Essentially, the argument has to do with urgency.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to stand and discuss the issue, clearly, of urgency. While all of these issues of safety are vitally important, all the development of those resources and the safety and the responsible development are always of great importance to Albertans. They are of great importance to this department. They are of great importance to the regulators that we have. I know that they are to the Department of Environment as well as the Energy and Utilities Board and all of those who are developing standards.

Though that be true, it is not a case of urgency. It states here an assertion: "to implement or enforce controls on companies engaging in coal-bed methane." That, first off, isn't even a true assumption. If you had no rules or regulations, I guess you might construe an urgency, but the fact is that we've been drilling wells in this province for decades. Hundreds of thousands of wells have been drilled in this province. Even last year there were approximately 18,000 wells drilled, and maybe 3,000 of those were coal-bed methane. The fact is that those well applications and each and every well application must be approved by the Energy and Utilities Board. There is a rigorous standard that must be met that deals with water, safety, quality, all of those things, in every and each application, very stringent and built upon decades of experience in how to handle oil and gas.

Coal-bed methane is still natural gas. It's the same natural gas that we drill most of the wells for. It just happens to be natural gas or methane in the coal seams. There is natural gas in most seams. As you go down in the geology, natural gas is prevalent in most of the seams. Closer to the surface it may have already come to the surface and out, but where it's trapped, there is natural gas prevalent everywhere.

We've had such a long-term history of dealing with natural gas

that it isn't even a new practice of drilling. They come in, and yes, they modify their techniques as to how to extract and that, but there's no need for a new framework. It's the same framework that we have had for decades and have experience and have had very safe, reliable, predictable outcomes. It's in that context that Albertans do have safety. We have very, very little incidence of public harm as a result of the tremendous amount of activity that happens in this province.

Coal-bed methane, it is true, is starting in that zone, but it's nothing new in the commodity in which it deals. In fact, most of the work is happening in natural gas zones where the pressure is lower than that at which the natural gas comes into your home. In the Horseshoe Canyon it's coming out a safer, cleaner methane than what comes into your home, under less pressure. So even the volatility of that commodity is no different. It's actually quite safe to handle.

It's the assertion that if there were no rules, I guess anarchy would exist, but the fact is that we have a very lengthy, complete list of legislation and regulation and enforcement bodies that are there dealing with those questions. If there was an urgency such that life of any individual was imperiled, there are processes that are active and available to all to access. The Energy and Utilities Board has that process completely. If there's something of paramount importance, that's the first body where one ought to go because they are the ones charged with and who have the ability and competence and expertise to judge the merits of the urgency and to act upon it and to take the corrective actions or enforcement procedures if any need be taken.

There is no case; there are no facts given. There's nothing to even demonstrate or prove that there's something that's wrong other than just a blanket assertion that there is an absence of rules, which for one is false, and that there's an absence of enforcement, which there's no evidence to believe either. There are bodies and rules in place for that.

So if there is an urgency, there are processes for how to deal with urgencies because safety is paramount. The first place you go is to the regulator who deals with that, the Energy and Utilities Board. If there were some things with the environment, you might go to the Department of Environment, and they do follow up, and they do monitor, and they do respond. If someone was in peril, they do and are active and are out there.

That doesn't always mean people get the answers they wish to get. It doesn't mean they might always have the outcome. What we are looking for is an establishment or an adjudication by fact. The safety of an individual or the public is better adjudicated at the Energy and Utilities Board than even here. The fact is that Albertans have lived safely with this for 50 years. Coal-bed methane is the same as natural gas.

We have one other. It's not stated here, but the inference is drawn that because we have this multistakeholder advisory committee that's drafting regulations on coal-bed methane, because we're doing work on improving regulations – the assertion is almost made that there are no regulations, which is false. We do have a tremendous degree of regulation in place. In this case it doesn't precede any immediate risk. We're working on just improving an already good structure. Every application is dealt with rigorously by the Energy and Utilities Board, and none of them goes through without having been vetted and approved and safely monitored.

The Speaker: Very, very briefly now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on the subject of urgency, which the chair would like to hear some arguments on.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak in support of this Standing Order 30, in regard to the urgency. You know, with all due respect to the Minister of Energy talking about this drilling as being no different. . .

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. The question of urgency has to do with whether or not there is alternate availability in the Assembly to debate the point, not the genuine emergency side. So it's not a debate with the Minister of Energy; it's a debate of urgency. Now, 12 minutes have now gone by. There's important business in this House. I want to hear arguments on urgency, or else I'm going to just rule.

Please proceed.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thank you. Well, the issue, I believe, why there is urgency is that we in fact have extensive drilling without proper regulation in place. In fact, there is a multistakeholder advisory committee that has put out some findings, and these findings are suggesting that there's a serious gap in the way by which the coal-bed methane drilling and extraction is being regulated, and on a day-by-day basis this is creating a problem that I think we could address best here and now in the most urgent manner possible.

You know, for one thing, until the government's groundwater inventory is completed in accordance with the Water for Life strategy, I believe that the CBM development, in fact, is in contravention or sort of at cross-purposes with the intention of the Water for Life strategy, which is now, I guess, causing problems for people in, for example, Rosebud and Wetaskiwin.

Second of all, we do not have proper scientific data determining the CBM development impact on groundwater. We have some assertions but certainly no clear data about that, and until there are industry and government requirements regarding testing and monitoring of groundwater before, during, and after CBM extraction, we believe that the cost should be borne by industry, but in fact it's being borne by homeowners here instead in terms of their loss of property value and the lack of ability for them to use their groundwater for their own drinking purposes and such.

So based on these and others, we believe that this Standing Order 30 is in order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 30 the chair has to make a decision as to whether or not to call the question. The chair also has in front of him a list of speakers from the Official Opposition and a list of speakers from government members, all wanting to participate in the Speech from the Throne. The Government House Leader provided to the Opposition House Leader the schedule for today. All members are aware of it, and now we have a Standing Order 30. I am prepared to rule on whether the request for leave for this motion is in order.

First of all, let me say that the notice received from the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View of his intention to bring a Standing Order 30 application came at 10:12 this morning, and the chair also confirms that the hon. member indicated the subject matter of his application at that time. Therefore, the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met.

Before the question as to whether the motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 30, which requires that the matter proposed for discussion relates to "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

I want to remind members that I canvassed all the relevant authorities last Thursday in this House with respect to another

Standing Order 30 application, and to refresh everyone's memories, the relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debates are *Beauchesne*, paragraphs 387 to 398, and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589. That was done three days ago in this House.

The criteria – and I want to underline and repeat the criteria – that must be met are that there must not be another opportunity for members of the Assembly to discuss the matter – the first part of it: there must not be another opportunity for members of the Assembly to discuss the matter. The second part is that it must relate to a genuine emergency. Arguments today dealt with the second part, essentially ignored the first part, other than for the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who dealt with the fact about opportunity.

But after listening to these submissions for some 15 minutes, I cannot find that this matter constitutes a genuine emergency within the meaning of Standing Order 30. I cannot sit in the chair today and say that there will not be another opportunity to debate this matter, and that's essentially what it's all about: the urgency. As I indicated last Thursday, there will be supplementary estimates as well as the main estimates. There is the Speech from the Throne, which is legitimate subject matter for the debate of the matter today. The Speech from the Throne began last Thursday. It could have been debated Thursday, yesterday, and today. And, of course, the matter was raised in question period. So in terms of opportunity, in terms of urgency about raising it, there are multiple opportunities with respect to it.

In terms of the genuine emergency of the subject matter itself, that becomes very debatable, as the chair and all members have heard. One member says such; another member says such. That becomes a debating point rather than a genuine emergency point, as far as the chair can understand.

I recognize that the subject of the Standing Order 30 application is a serious matter, but then so many other issues that are brought before the Assembly are also serious matters. There is an agenda. If this was a situation where there was no opportunity whatsoever, the chair might view this differently, but in terms of this particular application on this particular day with respect to this particular matter I will not call the question.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, and recommends the same to the Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving a number of motions relevant to the supplementary estimates, I wish to remind the House that I provided the government's 2005-06 quarterly budget report for the third quarter to all MLAs yesterday morning. At the same time, I also made this report public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act.

Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the 2005-06 supplementary estimates, No. 2. These supplementary estimates will provide additional spending authority to 12 departments of the government.

When passed, these estimates will authorize an increase of \$1,354,485,000 in voted expense and equipment and inventory purchases.

Mr. Speaker, the quarterly report serves as an amended fiscal plan when a second or subsequent set of estimates is tabled. This is in accordance with section 8 of the Government Accountability Act.

head: **Government Motions**

4. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2005-06 supplementary estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

5. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2005-06 supplementary estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund and lottery fund shall be two days.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

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

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

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

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 27: Mr. Liepert]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-West, would you like to continue?

Mr. Liepert: I adjourned debate. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity to rise and address this Assembly in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

In my short time having the honour to sit as the representative of the people of Calgary-Varsity, I have learned much. I have learned that ordinary Albertans, who the Premier likes to refer to as Henry and Martha, are recognizing that this government has no vision, that this government has little heart. The recycled content, the high-in-fat promises but low-in-fibre details of the throne speech leave Albertans hungering for a democratic change. This government continues to treat the vast majority of Albertans, the 78 per cent of eligible voters who were either so disenchanted or disenfranchised that they stayed at home or voted for a democratic alternative in the last election, as mushrooms. While mushrooms thrive in darkness, Albertans prefer light. They are demanding greater transparency,

clarity of vision, accountability, and respect from their government.

The government in the throne speech: Alberta is leading the country in “nearly every economic measure.” Well, it was quite disheartening to see in the *Calgary Herald* the other day that Alberta also leads the country in the number of casinos; specifically, Calgary leads the country in the number of casinos: \$1.1 billion lost by gamblers and fed into the insatiable government trough. Calgary is first in class. I’m not sure that this is a legacy that we can be proud of. Neither can we take any solace from the fact that Calgary has the lowest bed-patient ratio of North American cities due to this government’s preference to blow up and sell off rather than build public hospitals.

The government speaks in noble terms of funding research to eliminate cancer in the near future but refuses now to pay for the federally approved cancer treatment drugs, thus adding further financial stress to ongoing cancer sufferers.

The government talks about a learning society. While due to the support and dedication of parents, teachers, and elected school board members Alberta students fare well in standardized testing, this government finally acknowledged that we have a problem with almost a third of high school students failing to achieve graduation requirements. This is not a new situation, but it was only this year that the government finally decided to do a public consultation about high school dropout rates, which remain as high as 75 per cent for ESL students.

Albertans spent a lot of money on the Learning Commission only to have most of the recommendations that were accepted still waiting to be implemented. This government talks about the millions of dollars it is investing in education, but where is that money going? It is past time that we had an accountable system which lets Albertans see exactly where all of the so-called investments in education are going. Implement the Learning Commission recommendations. Albertans deserve a government that evaluates education on an ongoing basis and implements changes when the need is first indicated, not after years of wasting money trying to get Albertans to provide the answers that this government wants.

Has this government taken any steps to implement the Auditor General’s recommendations regarding the purchasing of textbooks? Textbooks are a very significant part of the cost of education at all levels. To think that in the year 2005 the Auditor General exposed the fact that we do not have any kind of group-buying program for textbooks that could lead to significant savings for students and for the government. I guess that an old, tired government rich with temporary resource revenues can’t be bothered to look after the pennies. There is an old, old saying that if you look after the pennies, the dollars will look after themselves. Unfortunately, this government acts as though it doesn’t have to look after either.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

This brings me to another part of the throne speech, that speaks to prosperity. The government has finally acknowledged that resource revenues belong to all Albertans. This being the case, why doesn’t this government allow the less fortunate to live with some sense of dignity? This government rarely takes the opportunity to explore the successful methods that are available to help the less fortunate to reach their full potential, whether they are seniors warehoused in long-term care or trying desperately on fixed incomes to remain in their overtaxed homes, people on AISH or with developmental disabilities, or the growing number of homeless. Despite growing gambling profits, this government’s version of economic diversification, skimmed off into the black hole of general revenue, charitable organizations and volunteers are more overextended than ever.

Where is this money going? Imagine having a new government that was prepared to keep their books open to all Albertans.

When it comes to infrastructure, this government still can’t talk straight. They talk about work beginning or continuing on schools, postsecondary capital projects, and health capital projects. Let’s come clean to Albertans. Give us a list, preferably not improvised on a napkin, clearly outlining what this government is doing with Albertans’ dollars. How many existing and already announced projects are included in the throne speech? Just exactly what is new spending? We could cure the problems in infrastructure with planning based on reliable evidence. Instead, Albertans live with ad hoc planning in spite of the amount of their dollars that this government says it has spent on research.

The solution to the problem is to elect a government that has new, fresh ideas for leading Alberta into a sustainable future, one that will eliminate the existing infrastructure debt rather than extending it for another 30 years through P3, private profit at public expense, projects. The Liberal Official Opposition plan of setting aside 25 per cent of all future surpluses to create an infrastructure endowment fund would first acknowledge and eliminate the current \$8 billion and growing steadily infrastructure deficit and then support future projects. Rather than further eroding the heritage trust fund or providing cash injections once every 20 years, a provincial Liberal government would annually bolster the heritage trust fund with 35 per cent of the surplus.

While this government talks about spending on capital investment in education, health care, and infrastructure, my constituency faces the closure of four schools’ programs based on a very fallible utilization system. We can look at alternative uses for empty school spaces if we use some imagination. It’s time to stop saying that schools must be closed if they don’t reach specified utilization rates, and it’s time to explore the many opportunities school vacancies offer to communities. A good Alberta government will recognize and understand the importance of community schools to the Alberta advantage.

Where’s the postsecondary plan? Why has the University of Calgary been forced to borrow over \$700 million for necessary infrastructure? Why were 9,500 students turned away from the University of Calgary, 8,000 from Mount Royal, and 4,500 from SAIT last fall although they had the grades and could afford the high tuition fees? An Alberta Liberal government would bolster and sustain postsecondary education through the creation of an endowment fund created by committing 35 per cent of annual surpluses.

We can actually experience what a caring community means. We can make sure that every single Albertan is recognized as an essential member of our fortunate province. We can recognize and celebrate the unique contributions that every single citizen makes regardless of their physical, mental, or financial circumstances. For those who cannot earn a traditional paycheque, we must ensure that they are able to maintain their dignity and continue to offer their nontraditional contributions to the rest of us.

We must also incorporate respect for the environment into government. Albertans deserve a government that can balance all interest groups and guide the province into a sustainable future: smart growth. We can have a future that doesn’t require the sacrifice of the environment for resources or the sacrifice of resources for the environment, but we have to work for it. Autopilot is not an option. Environmental circumstance brought us our natural resource wealth. We must understand that there are forces other than economic that contribute to the wealth of our society, our community, and our world. Let’s do the work required to ensure that we leave a sound environment for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, in this time of unparalleled opportunity Albertans

have little input into what this government is doing with their future. We have to improve our freedom of information legislation so that Albertans can see where this government is spending their money. We need a lobbyist registry so that Albertans can see who is paying for access to their government.

As well, we have to look at electoral reform so that the result of elections reflects citizens' direction. Where does this government address this? Alberta can lead the world in electoral reform. This is a different time from when our first past the post electoral system was implemented. The system we use now was designed over a century ago. We need to find a system that reflects today's realities. We need to look toward tomorrow. We need a government that not only allows but also encourages vision, a new way of doing government that matches the realities of the 21st century. It is in this spirit that the opposition has undertaken to foster a dialogue with Albertans about what electoral reform in Alberta could look like, including the creation of a citizens' assembly and proportional representation.

3:20

This government has done some good work. They balanced the budget, but then they continue to starve areas that they see as expenses but we see as investments. School boards and health region boards have been treading water for years, struggling to stay above water. Albertans continue to pay a health care tax. They continue to live with aging infrastructure in disrepair. They continue to have their access to natural areas restricted and made more expensive.

This government talks about healthy lifestyles, which is a very important part of the health care picture, but a year ago they voted against the nonsmoking bill introduced by one of their own members. They limited and eliminated coverage such as physiotherapy except in limited circumstances. Eye care and dental care are now a health necessity that is available only to those who can afford to pay out of pocket or have private insurance: the third way. Campgrounds that used to be accessible to most Albertans have been badly neglected by this government. The government has increased charges to a prohibitive level for disadvantaged Albertans who used to take their families out for a wholesome, natural experience. This, added to putting the less fortunate under increasing stress through more and more prohibitive program-qualifying requirements, shows that Alberta needs a new government, a government that values every citizen and allows every citizen to reach their full potential. It takes many kinds of citizens to construct a healthy, sustainable society.

To its credit this government struck an MLA task force on continuing care in Alberta. We are now about nine months after the Auditor General's scathing report on the situation, about six months after the task force report, and nothing has been done other than the latest announcement of a \$36 million fix to a government-estimated \$250 million problem. Albertans deserve a government that values all of our citizens, including our seniors. Senior care should not be viewed solely as an expense but as a repayment of an investment made many years ago, an investment that has contributed to the prosperity we are now enjoying. We can treat every senior citizen with respect and allow every senior to maintain his or her dignity. I have constituents who are seniors who have come to me in tears with horror stories about the services in long-term care facilities.

We have many citizens in Alberta that have special needs and require assistance to participate in society. I give this government credit for recognizing that some of our citizens will always need financial assistance. However, this government should be ashamed of the programs that do not acknowledge the individual's right to

participate fully in society and do not provide funding for our vulnerable citizens.

The government is to be commended for taking steps to protect children whose parents do not. The government has passed legislation to attempt to help children involved in prostitution and is now introducing legislation to try to protect children whose parents are involved in drugs to such an extent as to endanger their welfare. Our children need a government that will allocate resources and not be remiss in protection. The Alberta government has not said how it will respond to the federal government's cancellation of billions of dollars of child care subsidy transfers to the provinces. Where's the plan? The Premier has recently proven that he has trouble counting dollars. Albertans deserve a government that knows where and how their money is being spent, a government that lets Albertans see how business is being done. Albertans are entitled to an open and accountable government, a new government that understands and fosters real democracy.

I am sorry that this tired, old government has delivered a vague, incomplete Speech from the Throne. In a time of such opportunity Albertans deserve better. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Under our Standing Orders do we have questions?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year we had the pleasure of celebrating the centennial of the province. This year we mark 100 years of responsible government in Alberta, this being the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Legislature. Our form of responsible, democratic, parliamentary government is a proud legacy from the English Parliament, the heritage of which goes back to the middle of the 13th century. It's an appropriate time to look back on our accomplishments and what we have achieved as a province.

Today by almost any measure our province is the economic envy of Canada and much of the world. To be sure, our economic successes are a product of resource wealth, but they're also attributable to the hard-working, risk-taking, entrepreneurial nature of Albertans and to the vision and dedication of our governments.

We can also look forward. As Alberta enters its second century as a province, we face considerable challenges. The first of these is the knowledge that our conventional oil and gas reserves are declining and that resource revenues will consequently be diminished in the future. Our government will put a billion dollars from surplus earnings into the heritage fund this year, with further investments to come in the budget. We must use the current surpluses generated from petroleum and natural gas to continue to build the heritage fund. Increasing the value of the fund will help us to ensure the future viability of government programs, including health care, in the face of declining revenues. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to see that the government will continue to work to see that more value is added to our nonrenewable petroleum and natural gas resources and to our coal resources. I'm also pleased to see that we will add value to our renewable resources, including agriculture and forestry.

The second challenge confronting our province is our burgeoning population, which requires new infrastructure. New hospitals, schools, water and sewage plants, roads, overpasses, and other projects are all required. These require not only capital spending but increased operating budgets. To meet this challenge, the government has embarked on an ambitious construction program. In doing so, priority must be given to immediate and short-term needs, including building health care and education capacity.

The rural development initiative is also a key part of our plan. By

encouraging economic and population growth in Alberta's smaller communities, we will help to not only diversify the rural economy and shelter producers from uncertain conditions and low commodity prices, but we will also be helping to relieve the pressures caused by unprecedented growth in our larger cities, and we will also ensure that rural residents are full participants in our prosperity.

The third challenge is the shortage of skilled workers needed in our growing economy. Wherever possible we must increase career opportunities for Albertans, with a view to sustainability. To meet this challenge and to increase access, last year the government announced an ambitious plan to expand postsecondary education systems in Alberta by 60,000 spaces by the year 2020. We must follow through with this commitment. We must also work to ensure affordability of postsecondary education and training for all Albertans.

Our government has also committed to increase efforts to expand the First Nations workforce. This means ensuring that K to 12 education programs on Alberta's reserves are meeting provincial goals and standards for curriculum and quality. It also means a more direct involvement, with early intervention for aboriginal youth encountering learning and social challenges. It means even more skills training and apprenticeships for aboriginals.

Mr. Speaker, the fourth challenge which confronts us with the rapidly expanding population and economy and the attendant industrial development and exploitation of resources is the need to protect our environment for future generations. The protection of our air, water, and land has a direct effect on the future health and well-being of Albertans. We must move forward with policies to enhance and protect the environment even at the cost of forgoing some of the potential wealth which could be taken from our resources. We must develop comprehensive watershed-based initiatives to protect our source waters and to ensure future water quality.

The land-use framework that is currently being developed will assist in planning for our future. Such a framework must ensure that natural areas on Crown lands are protected and not sold and that they remain intact for the benefit of all Albertans now and in the future.

In the area of health and wellness, Mr. Speaker, other challenges now confront us. I'm pleased to note that this year our government is aiming to launch more pilot projects to reduce wait times in the areas of breast and prostate cancer and coronary disease. Our government should also be commended for working to expand the one-stop concept of health services, where doctors and other health care providers will work together to create a team approach to the treatment of Albertans.

3:30

I'm pleased that His Honour's speech renewed our government's commitment to making life better for those who presently live in care facilities by committing to new standards for facilities, upgraded training for staff, and better programs for residents, and I'm pleased with the effort to make Alberta an international leader in cancer research. However, whatever reforms are planned, we must ensure that reform of health care is done in a well-thought-out and measured way and in a way which accords with the values of Albertans. We must ensure that reforms do not diminish from the resources available to the universal public health care system, and we must ensure that the quality and timeliness of care for medically necessary services are never dependent on Albertans' ability to pay.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I was most pleased to note that His Honour's speech also included a commitment by the government that our province will remain a leader in Canada for government accountability and transparency. To that end, I feel confident that the govern-

ment will want to carefully consider the recommendations of a committee of this Legislature, the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee. This committee's report to the Legislature will be forthcoming later this spring and will include proposals for a lobbyist registry and an increased cooling-off period for former ministers as well as other recommendations. The report will recognize the need to attract persons of integrity from all walks of life to public service while at the same time balancing the need to improve the image of elected officials by encouraging impartiality, accountability, transparency, and openness in the conduct of their public duties.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have achieved much in the past. They have created the rich and vibrant communities which make up the diverse parts of this province from Zama City to Etzikom, from Waterton to Wood Buffalo. With such a legacy behind us and with the creativity, enterprise, and industry of young Albertans of today and tomorrow I feel confident in saying that what lies ahead of us in this great province is an even brighter and more illustrious future.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any questions for the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill?

Seeing none, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to respond to the Speech from the Throne. First of all, I would like to thank my constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to represent them here, for showing confidence in me in this Assembly. I will continue to do my level best to represent the interests of the hard-working people of Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The throne speech is obviously an expression of this government's desire to pursue a certain level of action over the years. What I find in the throne speech is clearly a mixed reaction from my constituents. I want to give credit to this government for taking the initiative towards cancer prevention. We have an excellent cancer infrastructure already in place. It's a good place to start. The government can and should take steps to reduce the incidence of cancer through prevention. The government should reconsider a total ban on smoking. I repeat: the government should reconsider a total ban on smoking, something that would not cost taxpayers any significant money and would have a great effect on reducing cancer.

It's great to see government's promise to save \$1 billion in the heritage savings trust fund after 20 years. This fund was established in 1976, and it is about time the government decided to put some money into this saving fund.

It seems to me that this old and tired government does not know where they stand as they don't have any long-term, sustainable policies, and they don't have surplus and resource policies or health care policies for the future of this province. Mr. Speaker, 91 per cent of the energy revenues in the last 25 years have been spent, meaning that less than 9 per cent has been saved so far.

Like all Albertans, my constituents have great expectations of all of us here at this Legislature. The people are looking for their government to be guided by professionalism, to be true to the government's promise of an open and responsible government, a government that is frugal when dealing with Albertans' purse strings. We promised Albertans that, and that is precisely what we will do. That is what we should do.

The government has been making various proposals for the privatization of the health care system. In the past they have talked about allowing doctors to operate in both the public and private systems. They also recently introduced a number of proposals, including looking at private insurance, but there was no indication in the recent throne speech that it has disappeared or that it is

completely off the radar screen. Is this government afraid of their federal cousins? This is a big, big question mark. They talk about the third way, and now they have turned back and sometimes call it the fourth, fifth, sixth, or seventh way, or perhaps it may be no way or a complete U-turn.

This government is not decisive, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have lost their trust in this government. Alberta has one of the strongest economies in Canada. [some applause] Thank you. People living here enjoy one of the highest standards of living, no doubt. Yet, Mr. Speaker, children are going to school hungry in Alberta. The use of food banks continues to rise. Why don't you clap now?

The gap between rich and poor is widening. Forty-two per cent of Calgary's residents are living on less than \$20,000 a year. The throne speech made no mention of a plan to close the gap between rich and poor. The rising cost of housing has kept many Albertans from pursuing their dreams of owning their own home. Government spending has been rising rapidly, but our social programs are failing to meet the needs of Albertans. There is a two-year waiting period for lower income housing in Edmonton. Where is the Alberta advantage for them?

I am surprised that there was no mention of a plan for the shortage of workers or permanent immigration in Alberta. The throne speech has made no mention of new funds for the arts or humanities, nor did the throne speech make any reference to policing or urban development or rapid transit or some other priorities.

Mr. Speaker, gang-related crime is a huge concern in our cities and is making our neighbourhoods unsafe. We need new strategies that will not merely punish criminals but eradicate the root cause of their behaviour. Albertans are turning to drugs, alcohol, and gambling in troubling numbers, and drug addiction is a growing problem. I see very little evidence in the throne speech to combat these problems especially. People are sick and tired of lip service from police officers and politicians like me; I admit that.

The throne speech also made no mention of our social and democratic deficit. The gap between rich and poor is widening. Take our democratic deficit. Alberta is one of the wealthiest provinces in Canada, but the democratic process is the weakest and secretive here. When the primary purpose of this government is merely to be re-elected, the province's wealth is far more likely to serve the ends of industry and government than of the public. If our prosperity is to serve the citizens, then serving the general needs of every Albertan should be our priority.

3:40

Unfortunately, this government has no interest in doing anything to renew our democracy. It has shown very little interest in electoral reform, for example, and such reform is absolutely necessary if we want a democracy that accurately reflects the desires of the electorate. Alberta desperately needs a government that is willing to embrace accountability and transparency. Alberta has no lobbyist registry, no fixed election dates, no all-party policy committee, and an almost meaningless legislative review of public spending. We also need to change the electoral system in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the government always proclaims that Alberta has the best education system in the world and that education is a top priority, but it is interesting that the throne speech had very few references to the educational policy. Our education system is facing a wide range of challenges. Right now only 69 per cent of Alberta's students graduate from high school within the normal three-year span, and only 75 per cent graduate within five years. Considering the demands and the opportunities of Alberta's growing economy, considering that within a decade Alberta could face a labour shortage of a hundred thousand people, it is incredible that we are

wasting the talent of so many young people in Alberta. We need students to stay in school, and we must provide this for their need to complete their education. For years our education system has had to struggle with rising demand and shrinking resources. Growing numbers of children with special needs are not getting the attention and help they need because our schools don't have enough teachers or counsellors or specialized staff.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a wonderful province of unlimited potential. We can manage what we have so much better. We can reach so much higher. Let's start building a better future for Alberta.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there questions of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie?

Seeing none, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to offer my reply to the Speech from the Throne during this the Second Session of the 26th Legislature of Alberta. As we celebrate the centennial of our Legislature, I'd like to salute the pioneers of our province, and at the same time I'd like to look forward to the incredible future that awaits our generations to come.

In his speech last week Lieutenant Governor Kwong stated that it was an honour for him to serve our province, and I believe that I speak on behalf of all members of the Assembly when I suggest that the honour is actually all ours. His Honour painted a wonderful sketch of our past, and he envisioned an even more amazing picture of what we might anticipate in our second century as a province.

Like His Honour, I've been fortunate to have met all sorts of wonderful people and from every corner of Alberta in the past year. I appreciated learning from people from across the province, and I especially enjoyed meeting with the constituents of my home riding of Calgary-Lougheed, which is located in the extreme southwest corner of our city. Mr. Speaker, each of the residents in the communities of Woodbine, Woodlands, Shawnee Slopes, Millrise, Evergreen, Bridlewood, and the southern and western portions of Canyon Meadows exhibits their own unique attitudes and actions, mission and vocation in life. They also share that strong entrepreneurial spirit that seems to define what it means to be truly Albertan. I was privileged to have met constituents of all ages at town hall meetings and community association meetings, in our schools and churches, seniors' facilities, shopping centres, and recreational areas.

It was an honour to visit with young people like Brendan Bellingham, who was one of the recipients of last year's Great Kids awards. I was also lucky to meet with more experienced folks, people like Marguerite Steele, who is one of our celebrated centenarians. Now, thanks to details outlined in last week's speech, I believe that Brendan has cause for excitement as we work together to create the best possible learning and working environments for our youth, and Marguerite can rest assured that we will be implementing new standards to promote excellence and restore the confidence of seniors and their families in our province's lodges, supportive living, and long-term facilities.

Last year *Maclean's* magazine proclaimed Alberta to be the most prosperous and the best place to be in the world, and Nova Scotia Premier John Hamm said, "We believe that your [economic] success is good for our entire country."

Now, while constituents of all ages told me that they're hopeful about our future, they also told me they have their eyes wide open to certain current realities. They know that while our growth as a province creates wonderful possibilities, it also creates very real

growing pains. They reminded me that we must remain diligent as we continue to build for the future of our families, our community, our province, and our country.

Mr. Speaker, although Albertans know that we are currently experiencing good economic times, they're also very well aware that we would be wise to invest a portion of our wealth today for an even better tomorrow. Those are just a few of the reasons why I'm sure that Albertans as a whole will be pleased to acknowledge that last week's speech outlined a billion dollar investment into the heritage fund.

While Albertans recognize the value of saving, they do not deny that a certain degree of spending is absolutely necessary if we are to provide services that are absolutely necessary and if we are to create an environment of continued growth. I draw attention to this because in the rapidly growing constituency of Calgary-Lougheed some of the issues of greatest concern include the construction of new schools, the south Calgary hospital, the southwest ring road, and the rebuilding of Fish Creek park after last June's floods. Considering last week's announcements that Alberta's level of support for infrastructure is unmatched anywhere else in the country and that in 2006 construction will progress at the fastest rate ever in our history, my constituents will be even more confident that we'll be moving in the right direction faster than before.

Along with the people of Calgary-Lougheed, the Lieutenant Governor, and my colleagues, I share a very hopeful view of the Alberta of tomorrow. I envision an Alberta in which we create and maintain a sustainable balance between industry, environment, and recreation; an Alberta that is truly the best place to live, learn, work, and raise a family; an Alberta which cultivates a diverse economy with much more than just oil revenues to keep us from running a deficit; an Alberta that never goes into debt and taxes reasonably and wisely. I think that we can all agree that with no deficit and no debt and the overall lowest taxes in the country we have a great start in these regards.

I envision an Alberta in which we provide our children with the best educational system possible, and I think we're well on our way in this regard. Last year over 7,000 new learning opportunities, including apprenticeships, were created, a new endowment fund and new scholarship programs were established, and several capital projects were begun. This year by continuing to address the issues that face students, such as rising tuition costs, we'll be creating an even better educated workforce than we have today. Other positive steps include addressing the need for skilled labour and identifying the factors behind high school dropouts so that we can tackle the problems involved in order that students can continue to complete their education and enter the workforce with the skills that they need in order to be successful.

I envision an Alberta that will make innovative changes to health care delivery so that we can ensure even more timely access to even higher quality health care regardless of ability to pay and at the same time providing our citizens with a more sustainable system which features more options than they currently enjoy and a better return on investment for their tax dollar. I'm very pleased to report that each of these points was raised in the Speech from the Throne, and I join all Albertans who were excited to learn that we'll strive to continue to be a leading centre for cancer expertise and that we'll be expanding upon the successes of the hip and knee replacement project as we use these experiences as a guide to improve other aspects of health delivery.

3:50

I envision an Alberta that alleviates the harmful effects of the abuses of alcohol, other drugs, gambling, and tobacco. As MLA for

Calgary-Lougheed I look forward to bringing forward motions which address each of these issues during this session, and as chair of AADAC I eagerly anticipate continuing to build on the many partnerships that we currently enjoy, along with supporting the growth of the Alberta drug strategy and the Alberta co-ordinated response to methamphetamine. I also look forward to assisting and furthering the world-class work of the fine folks at AADAC in their prevention, education, and treatment programs, as I've already identified in previous members' statements. I look forward to supporting new, proactive legislation upcoming in this regard and partnering with the Crystal Meth Task Force, co-chaired by Dr. Colleen Klein and Dr. Robert Westbury.

I envision an Alberta in which we treat the less advantaged with dignity and grace; we allow, encourage, and empower everyone to be the best they can possibly be, an Alberta that's governed by good old-fashioned family values; we take better care of ourselves, and we take better care of each other.

I envision an Alberta that is even stronger than it is today as it continues to be a leader within Confederation.

Mr. Speaker, it wouldn't mean much if we stopped at simply visualizing these realities. We need to go further and continue to develop specific sets of proactive, future-oriented, practical plans with concrete targets we can strive for, reach, and surpass. Thankfully, that's exactly the direction our legendary Lieutenant Governor sent us in in last week's Speech from the Throne, and now it's up to us. I look forward to working with everyone in this House in delivering on the high but realistic goals outlined in last week's speech. Indeed, the future looks bright for every one of us here in Alberta, and I recommit myself today to helping build the future of our province together with my colleagues and, indeed, with and for every Albertan.

God bless Alberta. God bless Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there questions of the member? Seeing none, the Member for St. Albert, please.

Mr. Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, thank you for acknowledging me. I'd just like to ask the member from Calgary . . .

The Acting Speaker: Sorry. Excuse me, member. Are you asking a question?

Mr. Flaherty: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry. I thought you were asking to speak. Go ahead.

Mr. Flaherty: No, I was asking a question.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Flaherty: I wonder if I could just ask the hon. member, in light of his function as chair of the commission, and I think he referred to it in the crystal meth comments that he made: could you tell me, sir, if I can get hold of the terms of reference from the Crystal Meth Task Force? What are the terms of reference they have? Secondly, I'd like to ask you who reports to the Legislature regarding the deliberations and recommendations from that particular group vis-à-vis the Crystal Meth Task Force. Thirdly, can you discuss the resources that they may be dealing with? Are we talking about resources such as facility staffing and research? [interjection] I'm not trying to be a smart ass with this, sir; I'm just trying to find out how we get information. I'm really talking on behalf of my

constituents, who are very interested in this particular function and what it's doing.

Thank you. I appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker: The answer, please, member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a fabulous question, and every Albertan has a right to know the answers to those. I am delighted to announce that the CEO of AADAC, Mr. Murray Finnerty, is indeed one of the members of that Crystal Meth Task Force. That is the AADAC presence on that board. Of course, he and I are in constant deliberation. I would suggest that contacting Dr. Robert Westbury is the pipeline that will give you direct access to every single question that you have there, sir. I'm sure they will continue to share their findings as they continue to tour the province and come up with their recommendations that we will work with in AADAC, Health, and the rest of the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Other questions of the member?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon and make a response regarding the Speech from the Throne as delivered by His Honour Norman L. Kwong on Wednesday of last week. Certainly, I would like to on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar personally thank His Honour for visiting our constituency last fall and presenting the centennial medals. It meant a great deal to the constituents that His Honour and Her Honour would take the time and visit Edmonton-Gold Bar. As the representative of that community, on behalf of the constituents I would like to thank His Honour and also commend him for his time and his patience with many other community groups.

Later in the fall His Honour and Her Honour found time in their busy schedules to visit an awards banquet for one of the local city high school football teams, one of the many successful high school football teams in and around Edmonton. Certainly, I think it's time that we look at some of the trophies that are presented for football in this province. We look, for instance, at some of the other trophies that are presented across the country. We look at the Vanier Cup, Mr. Speaker. We look at the Grey Cup. I think it's time that we in Alberta here have a Kwong cup as one of the trophies that young athletes could compete for. I would encourage all hon. members of this Assembly to think about this proposal and think about a way that we could honour His Honour. I would think that somewhere there is an award for excellence in football that could be named after our current Lieutenant Governor. Certainly, he's had a distinguished career in business, but before that he had a distinguished career as not only a Calgary Stampeder but as an Edmonton Eskimo.

Now, there are, certainly, many issues that have already been dealt with in regard to His Honour's speech, but there are issues that have been overlooked. As hon. members have already stated, there are many examples of our robust economic activity. We can talk about those, but one issue that I don't believe has been discussed – and I'm disappointed that I even have to bring it up. It's a fact that in this economic climate we are contemplating bringing temporary foreign workers into this country and into this province when there are so many Canadians who would like to participate in this economic activity that is occurring in this province, Mr. Speaker.

I was astonished to learn a couple of weeks ago that there is a proposal to bring in workers from China to construct a tank farm on

the CNRL site in Fort McMurray. We still have pockets of unemployment among aboriginal youth, among the youth in this province between the ages of 16 and 24. We have significant pockets of unemployment in other areas of the country. I really think that we have to look at making sure that everyone has had an opportunity to participate in this economic activity before we resort to this idea of temporary foreign workers.

No one will answer how much these workers are going to make, what cut of their wages is going to come off the top for the middleman. No one wants to discuss this. No one. I think it is inappropriate. Look at the massive tax concessions that are being made to companies like CNRL, yet they want to turn around and drive down labour costs with no justification, with absolutely no justification. It's wrong. It's poor public policy.

4:00

I said in this Assembly before that when we initiated development originally in the tar sands, there were provisions. These provisions were overseen by Economic Development to ensure that a percentage of the work went to the local economy, to the regional economy, to the provincial economy, and to the national economy. This has all been thrown out the window. I think this is just a sign of greed. It's just out and out greed that these policies would be initiated at this time, when we have not trained our own first. It's wrong.

Now, health care premiums. I was very disappointed in this throne speech to find out that health care premiums have not been eliminated. I fully suspect that when we have the budget here in four weeks, health care premiums will finally be eliminated by this government, completely across the board. It's time we have a tax cut that will help out small business owners as well as individuals. I will be the first one to thank the government if they eliminate health care premiums. If we can't afford to do it now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know when we will have the opportunity.

If the economy was to slow down at some point in the future, well, I would suggest that we cut the size of government. Maybe the RAGE portfolio over there, we could eliminate that. There are many portfolios. I think we could reduce the size of cabinet to perhaps 16 ministries. If we had to reduce the size of government, you wouldn't hear this hon. member opposing that; that's for sure, Mr. Speaker. We can afford to do this. You have taken other ideas from the Official Opposition, and I would encourage you to have a look at that.

Certainly taxes. We have heard from this government in the past that the only way taxes are going is down, but that is simply not true. That has been a hollow, false promise from this government, that taxes are going down. Now, Mr. Speaker, if we were to look at the third quarter budget update, you would see where personal income tax is up; corporate income tax is up since the last throne speech; school property taxes are up; tobacco tax has gone down – we can understand why; fuel tax has gone down – lower than forecast volume; insurance taxes have gone up. Now, as these taxes are increased, this is an ideal time for this government to look at tax reductions.

If you look at submissions from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, they are urging this government to look at ways of reducing taxes. The best way to do this is to eliminate the health care premium. Mr. Speaker, I will be very disappointed if during the budget there is not an announcement made that finally this government is going to realize that they have been wrong; they're going to listen again to the Official Opposition and get rid of health care premiums once and for all.

I look over, Mr. Speaker, at this government, and it reminds me of our Olympic hockey team. It looks good on paper, but too many

of the players here want to be captain of the team, and they're not looking after their respective portfolios like they should.

Now we look at some of the issues that have been ignored by this government. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie touched on it earlier. We look at some of the issues that the federal Conservatives, your federal cousins, are implementing around renewal of democracy and accountability and openness and transparency, and we see how the Canadian Federation of Independent Business feels about this. They value accountability, and they value transparency. I don't see anything in this throne speech, Mr. Speaker, that would satisfy the Federation of Independent Business or anyone else.

Small- and medium-size businesses feel that some of Alberta's democratic processes need to be strengthened. They would like to see the Auditor General's powers expanded; 76 per cent of them would like to see that occur. An independent panel to set MLAs' pay: 75 per cent of the business community would like to see that accomplished, and that's another policy of the Alberta Liberal Party. They, 54 per cent of them, would also like to see an establishment of predetermined election dates. That is a policy that certainly we endorse, and some members of the Conservative caucus endorse it as well, Mr. Speaker, if one is to review the Order Paper and look at some of the motions that are being discussed by members other than those that are in Executive Council.

There is also moderate support, research indicates, for capping election donations at \$5,000 and for establishing a lobbyist registry and even for examining new election methods to elect provincial governments: 45 per cent of people feel that we should cap election donations at \$5,000, 37 per cent think we should establish a lobbyist registry, and 29 per cent think we should establish a committee to look at examining new ways to elect provincial governments.

Twenty-eight per cent think that we should allow citizens to propose bills. I am very hopeful that at some point in the near future there will be a better way for citizens to propose bills to this Legislative Assembly. I think it is a good way to go, with a direct democracy, and I would encourage all hon. members of this Assembly to contemplate that as well.

Getting back, Mr. Speaker, in the time that I have left, to the third-quarter update that was delivered yesterday. We're never going to be satisfied with the billion dollars that we put into the heritage savings trust fund, but in the sustainability fund, that other good Liberal idea from the former Member for Lethbridge-East, in the 2005-06 forecast \$1.6 billion has been left unallocated. Fund assets are forecast at \$4.1 billion effective March 31, 2006. Well, I think that money should be taken now, before the free spenders over here get their hands on it, and that should also be put away in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. In order to inflation-proof the heritage savings trust fund, we would need to have better than \$19 billion in it at this moment, and we're not even near that. I would think that this money should be taken and set aside.

Money that we need to provide social housing; money that we need to provide respectful, decent care for our seniors; money that we need to fix our schools, our bridges, and our roads: it's already there, but it has been poorly managed by this government.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there questions of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar?

I will call, then, on the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

4:10

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

As the chair of the Standing Policy Committee on Energy and Sustainable Development I was pleased to hear a number of initiatives, which were highlighted in the speech, pertaining to alternate forms of energy. It's imperative that Alberta use our strengths in traditional energy sources such as oil, natural gas, and bitumen to explore and develop alternate energy sources. As was outlined in the Lieutenant Governor's remarks, Alberta is home to vast deposits of coal, and the potential contained within these deposits is also immeasurable.

Mr. Speaker, electrical generation through the development of clean-coal technology is a goal worth working towards. However, at the same time it is necessary for us to consider the strength and development of our electrical transmission system. All the generation capabilities in the world will not benefit Albertans if we are unable to transmit this energy to our industrial and residential communities. As our province's population and industrial needs expand, so does the need for a secure, reliable supply of electricity to power this development and growth. If we do not stimulate investment and development of our transmission infrastructure, electricity shortages have the potential to limit our province's industrial and economic growth.

Increased transmission capabilities will also allow for increased generation in our province. This can come not only from our traditional coal- and natural gas-fired generators but also from renewable energy sources such as wind, hydro, and geothermal energy. Currently Canada generates roughly 1 per cent of its electricity needs through wind power. Alberta is on the leading edge of this technology and is home to the country's largest wind farm, near Fort Macleod. This farm alone generates enough electricity to power 32,000 homes annually.

Diversification of our energy sources is beneficial not only to our environment but also to our economy. Clean-coal technology and renewable resources such as biofuels are innovations that will help Alberta remain a world leader in the energy industry.

The government of Alberta has made a good start in supporting green energy alternatives by entering into a contract which began in 2005. It was to purchase 90 per cent of its electrical requirements from green power. I believe that the government should continue down this road by promoting an environment where the development of green energy is a viable and thriving industry in our province.

Alberta's natural environment is a resource unto itself. As the natural beauty it contains has made our province into a world-class tourist destination, I was pleased to hear the environmental initiatives contained in the Speech from the Throne. But I believe that we need to look further down the road on issues such as recycling and waste management. Mr. Speaker, in Alberta there exists the will to move further along the path to becoming a province with zero landfills. Since 1988 the amount of per capita waste disposal per year has been dropping in our province. This is encouraging, but we need to address our waste management situation more aggressively than we are currently. By being serious about conservation now, we can address waste management issues before they become serious problems in our province. The land-use framework discussed by His Honour yesterday is an excellent first step to ensuring all land-use issues, including waste management, are discussed and addressed. All Albertans have an interest in how our land is used.

Our province gives us opportunities for exploration and recreation as well as economic growth through resource development, agriculture, and forest activities. These three industries are the top economic drivers of our province.

Forestry is an especially important industry in my riding of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. The forest industry has been facing some sizable challenges in the past few years, and it is important to ensure

that policy decisions the government makes with respect to this industry are responsive to the industry's needs itself. I applaud the announcement of continued funding to the Alberta Forest Research Institute as well as a commitment of \$1.8 million to spur on innovation in this important sector of our economy. By working with this industry, we can ensure that it is sustainable and viable well into Alberta's future.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has long been a land of opportunity, and at no time has it been more apparent than right now. Alberta has a chance to be a world leader in a variety of areas, and the priorities outlined in the Speech from the Throne will give this province a head start in securing its future. I'd like to voice my support for accepting the Speech from the Throne, and I would ask my colleagues on both sides of the House to do the same.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member. Any questions for the member? Go ahead, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member. On the Order Paper that has been circulated in the Legislative Assembly, Motion 510, as proposed by the hon. Member for Leduc, urges the government to "increase the supply of stable and reliable electricity to meet the demands of advanced manufacturing throughout the province . . . by increasing investment in transmission and associated infrastructure." This motion indicates to me that this hon. member is certainly less than satisfied with electricity deregulation. How does the hon. member feel that electricity deregulation has evolved in regard to transmission and the associated infrastructure, and does he support the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon?

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. Some good comments. Remember that transmission is regulated; transmission has never been deregulated. Transmission inadequacies that we have throughout the province are in part due to the success of this booming economy that we have. Fifty thousand people a year are moving to Alberta. Nobody brings their transmission lines and their power lines, as you well know. You know, we have to watch. In certain parts of our province today we are very, very close to having an inadequate supply of power. In Calgary alone a home is being completed every 45 minutes. We need to make sure that we have an adequate supply not just to those residents but to the industry that those people came to Alberta to work with.

So I think it's imperative that we move on with a strong, robust transmission policy and that we encourage our companies throughout Alberta to get going and expand our transmission systems. We need to talk with our regulators, whether it be the EUB or whether it be the ISO or whether it be our surface rights folks, to get on with the process and create an atmosphere where transmission can be built quickly and economically.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Another question? There's a question from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View first.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated some of the comments about eliminating landfills. I wondered also about how you feel about incentives for renewable energy and whether we're doing enough to incent some of the renewables, how we might do that and create a level playing field for some of these renewables in

comparison to the fossil fuel subsidies we've been giving for so long.

Mr. VanderBurg: There's no doubt it's an opportunity that we have right now here, not just in Alberta but throughout Canada and throughout North America, to embrace biofuels and opportunities to enhance the manufacturing of biofuels.

I want to get to your point on zero landfills. I've seen technology throughout different countries that has allowed these countries to move to zero landfill policies. It's going to be tough here in Alberta, in rural Alberta, especially on the regional side. But I think that it would be very, very easy for cities like Edmonton that have already taken 50 per cent of their waste stream out of the landfill and taken it to a higher value. For that last 50 per cent to me it only makes sense if we went to a system where we could generate heat and electricity out of that 50 per cent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know my time is up, and I appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker: We have another question from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. Again to the hon. member. Earlier you stated that there is a home in Calgary that is connected to the grid every 45 minutes, and there is significant new demand for electricity. How is the government policy of allowing the southern Alberta/Montana tie-line to go ahead going to reduce electricity costs for Calgary consumers?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again, I talked about a new home being hooked on to the grid every 45 minutes . . .

4:20

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. That concludes our time for questions.

I'll call now on the Member for St. Albert, please.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak to the Speech from the Throne. I was elected by the citizens of St. Albert to be a voice for my constituents and speak on the issues mentioned in the throne speech, Wednesday, February 22. The first thing I'd like to talk about is – I believe it's on page 2 – under the title A Learning Society.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In the Speech from the Throne it outlines the idea of a learning society, the idea of "government will work to further strengthen our education system" by sponsoring "a series of roundtables with youth from across the province . . . to help us better understand why students leave school early." The one thing I have trouble with in the Speech from the Throne is that I had the opportunity last week of going to a trustees' event, and they did an excellent job – and I tabled this in the House today – of identifying the top eight factors identified by the Alberta School Boards Association workshop participants dealing with dropouts. It really amazes me that the Minister of Education and staff don't rely on information like this in which to build linkages with school systems across the province.

Just let me quickly go over some of the eight factors because I think they're worth reviewing here today and try and get some insight into them. This is regarding the dropout problem. It suggests here that "Alberta Education ensure there is additional funding to support guidance counselling services and to co-ordinate

the delivery of multi-agency and school-based services including exit interviews of students leaving school.”

Then I whipped over today and looked at, for example, one of the smaller school districts. I believe it's the Catholic school system out at Elk Island. In terms of completion of high school, in 2003-2004 the provincial average of kids completing it in three years is 68.9 per cent. This school district in Elk Island has an 81.1 per cent fulfillment of the three-year completion rate. They must be doing something right out there.

The second thing in these top eight factors is “societal pressure to reinforce the importance of education generally and especially . . . outside jobs or leaving school early to work.” I cannot quite understand, when we have a system of education in this province where we're dealing with 15 per cent going on to academic training at the university and we have 85 per cent of our kids needing to be guided and helped, why we don't have, for example, a career education plan in our schools, especially in the junior high schools leading into high school. I don't understand why we don't have a diploma in career education. I think that's very, very important, and I think we've got to open our eyes. If you look at the literature that's put out by this government regarding education, we don't see careers as being a very big focus of their attention.

The third thing in these top eight factors that were brought up in this wonderful document, that I'm glad we have the opportunity to talk about and which I think is significant, is that

Alberta Education improve relevancy of provincial curricula and sequencing of high school core courses to ensure that the learning needs, aspirations and interest of non-university bound students can be addressed effectively in school programs, and advocate that post-secondary institutions review and modify if necessary their entry requirements (especially in Mathematics) to fit the level actually needed for success in the area of further study.

I think we need to explore more carefully the courses we have and how suited they are for kids going into a vocational stream in our schools.

This is the fourth thing they bring out in this fine document: “financial incentive/disincentive to keep kids in school.” Some of our kids leave school for three or four weeks. I think there has to be a way, if they come back, where we give them special tutoring, maybe in the evening, so they can catch up and ways of accommodating them in the school system, maybe even a tutoring process, which some schools I know have developed.

Then in this wonderful outline here: “ensuring each at-risk student has at least one adult in the school who knows them well and will support them in their learning [process].” I had the opportunity of working very closely with a school in Lethbridge, Winston Churchill school – I don't know if it has the same problems now – where teachers had 25 students under their wing. My job was to try and work with those teachers and give them insight into how to work with students in terms of some of their emotional and support needs at school. Bishop Carroll school in Calgary was another example where kids were not just seen as a piece of paper but had teacher counsellors working with them.

On Friday we also had Parkland school district, very close to this city, doing some interesting things. The trustee stood up and talked about interpersonal skills, that teachers carried that load with them to work with kids in the school, again making the environment mean something to them other than just exams and getting personal and knowing kids and where they're going.

Then it talks about here in the sixth point: “cross-ministry cooperation – aimed at increasing high school completion.” That's one of the principles they're talking about. One of our colleagues from Leduc the other day at this trustee meeting talked about the importance of parents instilling in their kids the value of finishing

high school, completing it. I thought that was a wonderful point the hon. member from Leduc brought up.

This is the last point in this document:

Alberta Education ensure that curriculum and funding are available for schools to work with students to assist them in knowing their interests and abilities and engage in meaningful and timely career development planning with trained career counsellors (not necessarily certificated teachers).

In my constituency I have several people, who have backgrounds and are retired, who work with kids in the schools' career resource centres and try and motivate kids about the careers that are out there and what's changing out there.

My point of bringing this up in this throne speech was the fact that I don't believe I have any indication that the present ministry is reaching out and linking and bringing some of these things from one school system to another, which was very common when I worked for the Department of Education. We brought the good news about some of the things from one part of the province to the other. I'm really questioning the value of a round-table discussion and what this means. Maybe the minister's got aspirations he's not telling us about.

Anyway, let me then just move along and talk a little bit about a healthy society. I would like to compliment the government on the work they did with the cancer bill. I think they deserve a lot of credit. I have lost my father, Denny, and my senior brother, Charlie, who was a navigator in the world war and successfully completed several operations during the war. Both died of prostate cancer, so I'm very pleased with the government moving on this.

One thing I looked at is on page 2 of the cancer bill, and I'd like to ask whoever's responsible for this – I guess it would be the minister of health – to add one other aspect of that under Purpose, where it would say: to support research that will evaluate what we take into our bodies in terms of our food, beverage, and smoking. I'd like to see some research on that. I think it would be very helpful to us. So I'm very much supportive of that and what the government's doing there. I think it's a good thing, and I'm glad they're doing it.

The other thing I'd like to just comment on – and I'm now speaking for my constituents in St. Albert. We have a wonderful public health system. The majority of people in our constituency think that, and they think it's very, very important. Certainly, it needs some serious updating. It needs innovation.

4:30

I just want to tell you that when I had my surgery for my knee replacement in the Misericordia hospital by a very fine doctor, who tried to convince me, by the way, that privatization was very important for health care – I was glad that we had this discussion; I think I'm winning him over. I think that a good example of the kind of innovation we need is the Alberta hip and knee replacement pilot project. That study brought together doctors, surgeons, physiotherapists, and nurses to solve one of the most troubling problems in health care wait times. They dropped a year-long wait time for joint replacement surgeries to an average of only five weeks. This project demonstrates that solutions can be found within the public system, and I commend the government for doing that. Now I hope that we can do it for other things which were mentioned by the minister of health today in addressing one of the questions.

Now seniors. We're talking still about a healthy society. I'm very much for the whole question of having standards. To this day I'm still sitting here trying to learn even from the good hon. minister that I'm looking at about how you monitor what goes on in seniors' accommodations. It's beyond me. I think that we need to have a look at that and have a commissioner that looks at seniors' operations and reports directly to the Legislature.

Every time the minister talks about health, he talks about insurance. I can tell you right now that many of my constituents, who are seniors, widows, cannot start thinking of paying insurance. There's just no way that they can afford that. I don't know where the government thinks that some people in this province, many seniors, are going to get the money to pay for extra insurance. It's beyond me. I really, really don't know.

Now, let me just comment again on one other aspect in the Speech from the Throne, where it says that we need to preserve for a prosperous society. I think it's significant to look at. People are saying that this government needs to have a vision, a long-term economic plan for maintaining where we're going in this province.

What's interesting to look at is the work of the Canada West Foundation, that conducted meetings across the province. Business types, educators, and leaders of nonprofit organizations all offered their ideas on what the government should do with its windfall of money. These discussions highlighted the need to increase funding for postsecondary education, bridge gaps in the province's infrastructure and social services, increase funding for the arts, and address quality-of-life issues so that Alberta will be able to attract and retain people. I think the interesting part of the document that was put out by the Canada West Foundation is that many of the supporters are good Tories. So they must have some really good thoughts as to where the economy must be driven in the coming years to look after the well-being of Albertans.

Also, I think it's worth noting that the president of the University of Alberta had some comments about what the government should be doing in terms of maintaining its prosperity of Alberta society. She said that Alberta ranks seventh among the 10 provinces in providing operational grants to postsecondary institutions and holds the same spot when it comes to the percentage of students participating in postsecondary education, that this means that the province must rely on getting people from elsewhere to meet its soaring demand for skilled labour, and that this simply isn't sustainable. She also pointed out that the fastest growing occupations require the highest levels of education and that on a per capita basis Alberta educates fewer graduate students compared with other provinces even though there are more students applying for spots in postsecondary institutions.

Then she makes a third comment, that the looming skilled labour shortage has put the spotlight on the sciences and technical fields, that these disciplines have received the lion's share of funding from the province and the private sector and that, on the other hand, there are precious few announcements of big dollars going to the social sciences. The president says that we ignore an area at our peril because without what she calls social ingenuity, society will not be able to take full advantage of the scientific and technological breakthroughs. She calls it the third leg of the stool.

Let me just close, Mr. Speaker. If I could just say that the thing that disappointed me – and I guess I'll have to close because I can't find my notes. One more thing I want to mention . . . [interjection] Be quiet, Gene.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. Please, hon. member, your time is up. It's not appropriate to tell somebody else to be quiet.

Mr. Flaherty: I'm finished?

The Speaker: You are finished, hon. member. Would you sit down, please. You are finished. It's certainly not appropriate to lecture another member when you're beyond your time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to the Speech from the Throne, which His Honour the Lieutenant Governor delivered in this House on the 22nd of this month and delivered in a very dignified manner. I want to thank him very much for what he represents in Alberta and for his readiness to serve Albertans in this capacity, which is quite demanding of his time and effort.

I also want to note that in responding to this speech, I'll be speaking on behalf of my constituents, the constituents of Edmonton-Strathcona. Mr. Speaker, the context of this speech is something that I want to underline first. Alberta is beginning the second century in its historic development. Albertans are duly proud of the accomplishments of the last hundred years, accomplishments that are a tribute to their ability to work together collectively in a co-operative manner to build the institutions from the fields of education to health to government in the democratic realm. So that's the context.

In this context of the beginning of the first century I was hoping to read a throne speech which is inspiring, which sets new goals for the 21st century, which is ambitious, which is not timid in what it conceives of Alberta's possibilities and Alberta's future. I must confess that I'm disappointed in the very timid and uninspiring tone of the speech, given that context. Albertans, while they have been celebrating the successes and achievements accomplished over the last hundred years, were certainly ready to hear where we need to move forward.

Two areas I'll mention very briefly: the area of social deficits that have been developing in this province and child poverty. About 16 per cent of the children of this province continue to live in poverty while our economy is the most productive if not the most prosperous in this country. Homelessness is another issue. When children are poor, we know that their parents are poor, that families are poor where children are growing up, and many of these families live under conditions of homelessness. So I would have thought that at least there would be an acknowledgement that here is a challenge that this government wants to set before Albertans to meet the challenge of social deficits.

The second major deficit that we've been talking about in this province, not only here but across the country, is the democratic deficit. It's important to renew the vigour of our democratic institutions. We need to think about and put before ourselves the goals of re-examining our electoral systems, the election funding systems, the whistle-blowing legislation, disclosure legislation. These are matters that are being addressed in other jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

I had the occasion to attend on behalf of this Legislature a COGEL meeting in Boston at the beginning of last month. The key themes at that conference had to do with how to make our governments more democratic, more accountable, how to strengthen whistle-blowing legislation, how to strengthen disclosure legislation, particularly relative to how election campaigns are funded. We were quite amazed to hear how in the U.S., in fact, they have moved forward quite energetically on this front, and some of the governors in U.S. states have been impeached for violating election funding rules that have been put in place. So I would have thought that the second front on which we need to set some goals in the area of democratic deficit and, therefore, the other side of the coin is the revitalization of democratic institutions in this province. I'm afraid that both of these issues are not even touched on in this speech, and that, I think, is a missed opportunity, which I very much regret.

The other issue of democratic deficit and democratic revitalization

has to do with our own legislative committees. Particularly talking about the Public Accounts Committee, John Williams, the Conservative Member of Parliament for Edmonton-St. Albert, expressed his absolute amazement to me in a personal conversation with me about the lack of ability of the Public Accounts Committee in this Legislature to do the things that the federal accounts committee is able to do. He was appalled by the lack of powers invested in committees such as those. So these are some of the things that I wish we had the opportunity to talk about, and I wish the government had taken the opportunity to put these things on the agenda.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to focus my comments on the throne speech on the section on a learning society. The idea of a learning society has been around for many, many years, promoted by UNESCO, implemented in many different countries in western Europe and Europe in general. The key idea there is that lifelong learning is the basis, the foundation for a learning society. In other words, you start to learn very early, and you never give up. You keep on learning. You keep on returning to opportunities to learn new things, to educate yourself, to renew your skills and abilities and your knowledge about the world, that is changing and changing dramatically in many ways, not only in terms of technology but also in terms of the total amount of knowledge that we have and how knowledge begins to get very obsolete in this kind of fast-changing society.

I find here that the section on the learning society is one of the smallest ones, yet we talk about entering the 21st century into a society that's a learning society, that's a knowledge society, that's an information society. The amount of space given here and the kind of issues touched on in the throne speech draw my attention to the very limited vision that this government has about what action to take, what agenda to propose to Albertans with respect to creating a genuine learning society. Focus here has been very, very limited, very narrow, and that's a serious disappointment, Mr. Speaker.

Even within that focus some questions have been alluded to with respect to where the government might be going in relation to its policies on postsecondary education. Mr. Speaker, one of the disappointments that I've had is with the very limited public discussion that the Minister of Advanced Education and this government have allowed to happen in the area of the future of postsecondary education. That certainly is a concern. Government missed a huge opportunity to engage Albertans in general into public hearings and public meetings on debating the future of postsecondary education as part of its learning society model. The minister created a sort of committee to consult. It consulted but in a very, very limited way.

I heard from Jeffrey Simpson, one of the columnists for the *Globe and Mail*, who was invited by Public Interest Alberta over the weekend just past to give a sort of opening address to the PIA's weekend conference on postsecondary education. One of the things that he mentions there is that postsecondary education is absolutely critical to the future society in which we are going to be living and our children are going to be living. It needs more public support, but in order for it to have more public support, the public has to be engaged in debating where we want to go, what direction we want to take. It's very unfortunate that this government and the minister in charge missed that opportunity, in fact limited deliberately the ability of Albertans to publicly engage their government and their political leaders into asking questions about where we want to go with postsecondary education.

So that, in my view, is another concern that I have, that the government is very, very concerned about engaging Albertans genuinely in giving feedback on the government policies and where they want their government to go. It's in a sense a lack of confi-

dence in democratic participation, and here again the whole question of democratic revitalization comes to mind. We need to engage Albertans as citizens. We need to be able to put faith in their judgments. We seem to be missing on that, and this government certainly I think has to take some responsibility for not encouraging Albertans to be engaged on these vital issues of our times.

In the remaining time, Mr. Speaker, I want to dwell on the early end of the learning society spectrum or continuum and the child care and early learning for our children. I am very concerned about the fact that not even a mention was made in the throne speech about what steps, what programs this government is willing to unfold in order to make sure that all children begin to learn early in their lives and that those very early years from age one to age four are the most critical years for us to be able to give those children the abilities and the skills that they will need not only to succeed as they move into elementary school and move upwards but in order to succeed later on. Learning starts very, very early, and the critical importance of learning that takes place in the very early years is something that's not recognized in government papers, in government policies, and certainly in the throne speech.

The government has in my view failed to embrace the opportunity that was before it because the early learning and child development issue became a major issue during the federal election. All parties in a sense addressed the issue, and what I find amazing and somewhat shocking is that whoever wrote that speech and whoever was responsible in the cabinet to give it the final touches didn't see the vacuum, didn't see this strange silence on the issue of where this government stands, what its commitments are to building a system of early childhood development and learning in this province. It is those foundational steps that lead to greater success for our children as they move into the formal education system. So it's an opportunity that was missed, Mr. Speaker, and the government's agenda and its narrow focus are very clearly evident in this field again.

We can talk about a learning society. We can use the sort of flowery language of how learning is important, how we need to build a society which doesn't just rely on natural resources and whatever have you but that, in fact, our wealth will increasingly depend upon creating more enriched human capital for the future society. But that human capital will not happen unless we dedicate our resources, unless we intelligently engage ourselves in debate on how we can make sure that the vast majority of our children who are not in school but will be in a few years prepare themselves to enter school much better prepared than their predecessors have been able to do. With our provincial government's agreement that it signed with the federal government just about six, eight months ago, there was an opportunity for us to begin to develop those kinds of facilities in this province.

4:50

My fear is that the fact that this child care issue didn't get even a mention in the throne speech is a result of the fact that the provincial government here is responding to the position that the new federal government has taken on pooh-poohing the whole idea of creating a national system of early learning and child development. The government by its silence on this issue seems to be agreeing with the dismantling that the federal government is proposing of the system of early childhood education and care that we have and, in fact, is agreeing that there's no need for us to put some more effort into making the system better, more easily accessible so that it can provide quality learning experiences to our children when they really need it, in the very early years.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'll simply conclude by saying that I'll continue to work on these two issues. The postsecondary issue and

the early child care issue are two issues that I'll be certainly focusing my attention on in this session.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, we do have Standing Order 29(2)(a) available. I'm going to need another speaker because the time for this speaker has now evaporated, and his speech has not been adjourned. But we're now in section 29(2)(a).

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, may I rise to adjourn debate?

The Speaker: Well, no, you can't because your time has already expired. I just ruled against the previous gentleman.

We do have this five-minute segment in here, so let's see if there are some questions. The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: It is indeed my pleasure at this time to take the opportunity under the particular reference that the Speaker has mentioned to talk about the important initiatives that have been identified in the Speech from the Throne. I might also want to take the opportunity to compliment many of the points that the hon. member has mentioned relative to the proactive initiatives that have been mentioned in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, all of us have two types of energy, be it positive energy or negative energy, and it's all in the attitude that we take and how we choose relative to the Speech from the Throne.

The Speaker: Please work with me, Minister of Environment. Are you under the section 29 subsection with the question and answer, or are you participating in the Speech from the Throne?

Mr. Boutilier: I was going to pose a question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Boutilier: I appreciate his indulgence relative to that. I would, through the chair to the hon. member, pose this question when it comes to what we imagine pertaining to the issue of environment. I ask the hon. member, relative to the important initiatives on environment that we identified in the Speech from the Throne, if in fact he would like to offer additional suggestions and help in terms of how we build on the excellent work we are doing on the environment and what we can do in terms of enhancing it even further in this the 21st century pertaining to protecting the environment.

The Speaker: Hon. member, would you like to respond?

Dr. Pannu: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to respond to this energetic Minister of Environment's question. I think that on the environmental issue again the emphasis on the environment was very limited in the speech. What is there is there for everyone to read, so I won't regurgitate what's there. What's not there is something that I do want to mention.

I was reading the business section of the *Globe and Mail* this morning, and there was a very interesting article there about what European societies have done on the environmental front in terms of reducing the consumption of fossil fuels; conservation, that is. I find absolutely no mention, no commitment on the part of the government through this throne speech on what measures it proposes to Albertans that it will take in order to move us towards conserving energy so that the use of energy is not seen as something that's left to every individual but that we all collectively take responsibility for cutting back on the dependence on fossil fuels, on fossil fuels that

have only a limited life. You know, after that, they're not renewable.

We need to be developing alternatives, and one of the key points that was made in today's article in the *Globe and Mail* with respect to this conservation focus that European societies have is that as a result of this, these societies are investing huge amounts in alternative energy resources. They'll be the ones who will be selling this technology all around the world, and we'll be still using our fossil fuel and, in fact, increasing our dependence on it and missing the boat on entering into a sort of new world of technology, of knowledge, of information where wealth will be drawn from our ability to conceive of these new technologies, new ideas, new ways of both conserving and protecting our environment yet also becoming rich as a result of it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the hon. member's comments, but I think that perhaps what has been lost in this discussion and what has been mentioned in the Speech from the Throne is the idea that this province will be the only province and the only government in the history of Canada when it comes to holding an environmental youth summit. There are no other governments in Canada that have chosen to do that. What has been mentioned in the Speech from the Throne is the fact that this government will be in fact holding a youth environmental summit, referred to as YES, where we will harness together young minds and young ideas from all over this province in the upcoming fall, when we will be in fact talking in even more detail in terms of the importance of the youth and the ideas and the energy and the ideas that the hon. member mentions.

In fact, it has been mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, and this province will continue to build on the ideas of harnessing the ideas of youth in this environmental youth summit.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 4
Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006**

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to move for second reading Bill 4, the Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006.

In August 2005 the government of the United States passed legislation extending daylight saving time by four weeks, beginning in 2007. Following the decision, Alberta began to look at the pros and cons of changing daylight saving time in our province. As part of making the decision, Justice consulted all ministries and relevant stakeholders, including agriculture, education, energy, and the financial, industry, and transportation sectors. The decision among the majority of stakeholders was to synchronize with the United States.

Presently daylight saving time is observed from the first Sunday in April to the last Sunday in October. With the passage of Bill 4

daylight saving time would be extended by four weeks, starting on the second Sunday in March and ending the first Sunday in November.

Mr. Speaker, history would indicate that changing daylight saving time has been met with some reservation. In the past Alberta made attempts through plebiscites to have daylight saving time run on a full-time basis. This never came to be, but in 1971 a majority of Albertans did vote in favour of daylight saving time on a full-time basis during the summer. Since that time, there has been only one occasion when the act was amended. In 1987 the period for daylight saving time was extended by having it begin sooner, moving from the last Sunday in April to the first Sunday in April. This decision was the result of the United States changing when they observe daylight saving time. In Canada all provinces with daylight saving time followed.

At the time of the 1987 amendment the department of federal and intergovernmental affairs conducted a study into why we had daylight saving time. The study concluded that most jurisdictions in North America observed daylight saving time, and it was important for Alberta to be consistent with our trading partners.

5:00

Nineteen years later the rationale for this change to daylight saving time remains the same. Alberta needs to maintain its competitive advantage by co-ordinating time changes with our major trading partners and ensuring that our financial, industrial, transportation, and communication links are harmonized. For example, the financial sector noted that banking, money market, and investment operations deal with Toronto- and New York-based institutions every day and already face deadlines for settling transactions based on the hours banks are open in the east. Shareholders in the agriculture sector suggested that co-ordinating time changes would be helpful in the transportation of live animals and perishable food at border crossings. The transportation industry expressed concern over the impact on flight schedules if we did not make the change.

I should note, Mr. Speaker, that when I speak of trading partners, this is not just our southern trading partners but our partners within Canada. Four other provincial jurisdictions have already made the decision to proceed with the change to daylight saving time, including Ontario and Quebec.

Mr. Speaker, I've touched on the importance of changing daylight saving time from a trade perspective, but there are other benefits as well. Transportation Canada has advised that there will likely be a reduction in the number of pedestrian and motor vehicle occupant fatalities and injuries as the highest frequency of accidents occurs between the hours of 5 o'clock and 8 o'clock p.m. The extra daylight would make pedestrians more visible. Another major consideration to take into account is energy savings. Individual households could benefit from extended hours of daylight as less electricity and natural gas would be used.

Mr. Speaker, I've outlined a number of important reasons to support this bill. I ask that members do support Bill 4 as it goes forward. Thank you very much.

At this time I would ask that we adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure

this afternoon to move for second reading Bill 5, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill deals with minor amendments to three pieces of legislation; namely, the Civil Enforcement Act, the judicature amendment act, and the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act. Amendments to the Civil Enforcement Act will further refine and clarify the process for creditors who are seizing property, amendments to the judicature amendment act will refine and clarify original amendments that allow structured settlements in injury and death cases so that payments can be made in instalments, and amendments to the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act will modify the requirements for filing and duplicating records and will allow records of court proceedings to be certified both orally and in writing.

There are two amendments being proposed to the Civil Enforcement Act so that all types of creditors who are seizing property can use the same process under the act. The courts have ruled that a seizure of property that was already under seizure is invalid. Amendments to this act will help to resolve conflicts between various creditors about who has the right to seize property and who does not. A distress creditor is usually someone, such as a landlord, who is owed rent by a tenant and who has the right to seize the debtor's property without a court order or judgment. An enforcement creditor is someone who has the right to seize the debtor's property under a court order money judgment.

The act now provides that a distress creditor can give notice of his or her claim to a civil enforcement agency that has seized a debtor's property on behalf of an enforcement creditor. This means that the seizing agency would have to notify the distress creditor before releasing property that has been seized. The distress creditor may then choose to obtain a court order to take control of the seizure or effect a second seizure to protect his or her interest in the seized property. The proposed changes would allow the same provisions where the property is already under seizure for a distress creditor and an enforcement creditor.

One amendment to the Civil Enforcement Act addresses the situation of a distress creditor, such as a landlord, having seized property when an enforcement creditor, such as a credit card company, also wants to seize that property. There is no mechanism in the legislation now that allows an enforcement creditor to have the same property seized or to have the existing seizure transferred to him or her when a distress creditor releases a seizure. The amendment would allow an enforcement creditor, a person who has a right to seize property under a money judgment, to give notice of his or her claim to a civil enforcement agency that has seized personal property on behalf of a distress creditor. The civil enforcement agency would have to give notice to the enforcement creditor before releasing the seized property. The enforcement creditor may then choose to make an application under the act. The act already addresses the situation of when two enforcement creditors want to seize property; that is, when an enforcement creditor seizes a debtor's property, he or she does so on behalf of all other enforcement creditors.

The second amendment to the Civil Enforcement Act requires an enforcement creditor to obtain a court order when taking control of the seizure process or when effecting a second seizure of a property that is already under seizure on behalf of a distress creditor.

The second piece of legislation we're dealing with is the judicature amendment act. Minor amendments will refine and clarify original amendments that allow the courts to order that monetary awards be paid in instalments. This will help protect the current and future needs of Albertans impacted by injury or death. The original amendments, passed in 2004, allowed for structured settlements so that payments could be paid in instalments rather than in a lump

sum. Mr. Speaker, these were very important amendments as lump-sum payments can pose difficulties and additional challenges for victims of serious injuries or families who have lost an income earner. Lump-sum payments are subject to inflation and tax on investment income. Some victims and their dependants with long-term needs either spend their awards or greatly reduce them through investment choices. Following the 2004 amendments there was more feedback and consultation that have brought forward the minor amendments before us today.

One of the amendments will provide clarification of the court's discretion to order a structured settlement when it is in the best interest of the plaintiff. Although the initial amendments allow the courts to order structured settlements, the section now provides guidelines for doing so. A hallmark of structured settlements is their tax-free status. To ensure the status, another amendment reflects provisions of the tax act.

Amendments to the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act reflect developments that have occurred with the introduction of digital recording in the year 2000. The proposed amendments will change the definition of court reporter and will allow more flexibility in how records of court proceedings are certified. The amendments will also clarify how records of court proceedings are stored and how long the originals are kept.

The current legislation defines reporter as "an official court reporter appointed in accordance with the *Alberta Rules of Court*" and includes a stenographer or typist appointed by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Today official court reporters are not necessarily appointed. The *Alberta Rules of Court* were amended so that any person certified as a shorthand reporter under the Alberta shorthand reporters regulation is by definition an official court reporter. Typists who work for persons or companies appointed by the minister as court reporters do not receive individual appointments. The proposed amendment states that a reporter is "an official court reporter as defined under the *Alberta Rules of Court*" or a person appointed by the minister as a court reporter, including an agent or an employee of that person.

The act permits evidence given in court proceedings and civil cases or matters under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act to be recorded by machine. The judge who presided over the proceedings or the clerk who was in charge of the machine must certify the machine-made recordings. A certificate signed by the judge or clerk can be used as proof that a recording is the record of the evidence taken in the court proceedings.

Before digital recordings tapes were used to record court proceedings, and the judge or clerk would sign a certificate stating that a tape, identified by number, contained the record of the court proceedings held on a specific day. Tapes are no longer used because court proceedings are digitally recorded and stored on servers. As a result, clerks certify the digital recordings orally by speaking into the digital recorder. The regulations were amended to permit oral certification of the record, and now the act is being amended to reflect that.

A related amendment is the transfer of authority to make regulations prescribing the manner and form of certifications given under the act. The authority is being transferred from the Lieutenant Governor in Council to the minister, and it includes the power to prescribe that certifications relating to records and transcripts may be done orally or by electronic means. This will make it easier to make changes in how records and transcripts are certified in the future as the need arises.

5:10

The act now requires the records of court proceedings "be filed in

the office of the official having custody of the records of the court." Digital recordings are not filed. They are made on the hard drive of a computer in the courtroom and are transferred to a server. The amendment provides that records shall be "stored and maintained by the official having custody of the records of the court and shall not be removed except as required" by statute, a rule of court, or a court order.

Section 7 of the act says that any time after six months from when a record is created, a duplicate may be made and the original record may be erased. It's proposed that this section be repealed as it gives the impression original recordings are being erased shortly after they are made. That's not the case. Original recordings are kept for at least 10 years, until they are destroyed in accordance with the act.

I'm happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that that concludes my remarks relative to this particular bill. I do ask members to support the bill. While they are minor amendments, they are important to the proper operation of those pieces of legislation.

I would like to conclude by asking that the debate on this particular matter be adjourned at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6

Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to move for second reading Bill 6, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, there are four amendments included in this bill which facilitate better access to justice for Alberta families dealing with the maintenance enforcement program. The legislation will also clarify existing sections of the Maintenance Enforcement Act to allow for better client service. Specifically, the four amendments relate to the application of payments, financial examinations, maintenance agreements, and access to certain locked-in retirement savings.

The first amendment deals with how payments are applied and will ensure that more money reaches creditors before MEP keeps any for penalties or fees. Mr. Speaker, under MEP there are a number of possible support payments that debtors can be required to make. The most common would be the regular court-ordered payments paid every month, twice a month, or weekly in some cases. These are called periodic support payments. However, there are other kinds of payments that might be owed to a creditor for the current month that are not periodic support payments. For example, the court might have ordered that court costs be paid or a large one-time lump-sum maintenance payment. Another type of common payment that might be owed is what is called additional expenses, like the share of the children's medical costs, daycare, or extracurricular activities.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, money collected by MEP is applied first to the current month's periodic support payment, then to arrears and penalties, and, lastly, to those other amounts owed that I just mentioned. Because additional expenses, one-time maintenance payments, and court costs are not periodic payments, the Maintenance Enforcement Act now says that these are to be paid only after arrears and penalties have been satisfied.

The changes to the act will clarify that all current maintenance payments, whether periodic or one-time-only payments, must be paid first before any funds can be applied to arrears or MEP's penalties. This reflects the priority of the financial needs of Alberta

families while still allowing MEP to maximize its collection of fees.

Mr. Speaker, the second amendment deals with financial examinations. This amendment will improve current process, including allowing staff to better accommodate debtors' schedules and reach debtors who are avoiding MEP. Currently MEP can summon a debtor to appear at MEP's office to be examined regarding their employment, income, assets, and financial circumstances. Financial examinations have been exceedingly successful for MEP. This initiative has realized the collection or resolution of a monthly average of about \$900,000 of support arrears. That's a significant amount of money for Alberta families.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to point out that this process has been valuable for debtors, who have had the chance to come clean with MEP and make a fresh start. Many have provided enough evidence to MEP to result in a significant reduction in arrears. These debtors have also avoided the default hearing process, thereby avoiding potential jail time. Financial examinations have also saved the department in court time.

The amendments will allow for substitutional service orders for summonses and for any other orders the court feels are advisable. The ability to obtain substitutional service orders will allow the program to bring debtors who are constantly evading service in for financial examinations. With these amendments we will also clarify that examinations can be adjourned and continued at a later date without re-serving the debtor. This means that fewer cases will be brought to court for default hearings, and adjournments will allow MEP to accommodate debtors' schedules. In sum, Mr. Speaker, these changes will allow MEP to put to better use one of its collection tools, one that has already proven to be of tremendous benefit to the program and its clients.

The amendment to maintenance agreements under the bill will make it easier for people with these agreements to have MEP administer their maintenance. Mr. Speaker, two people who enter into an agreement for maintenance for a child, spouse, or adult interdependent partner can use a maintenance enforcement support agreement. The maintenance enforcement support agreement is also the form of agreement used under the Family Law Act. These agreements are invaluable for separating parties because they save time, money, and litigation. They also encourage noncourt methods of resolving child and spousal support issues, which can mean more amicable settlements for families.

With the advent of the provincial child support guidelines contained in the Family Law Act, it is expected that more parties will choose these agreements rather than to go to court. Currently to have their maintenance enforcement support agreements enforced by MEP, parties must first file the agreement at the Court of Queen's Bench and serve notice of the filing on the other party. The amendments proposed in Bill 6 will mean that parties will not need to file the agreement or give notice of the filing to the other party. Instead, MEP will file the agreements and give notice for their clients. This provides Albertans with increased customer service. Furthermore, these changes will increase access to justice as it will be easier for unrepresented parties to make their own enforceable maintenance agreements.

Mr. Speaker, the final amendment I wish to address is to the current rules locking in some retirement accounts. These can be a hindrance in giving needed support to Alberta families. The proposed amendments will facilitate children being supported by locked-in retirement account, or LIRA, funds in cases where debtors are not voluntarily paying maintenance. Currently MEP can garnish retirement savings vehicles, including locked-in retirement accounts.

The ability for MEP to access funds in LIRAs was approved and passed in this Legislature in 2004. This tool improves collections on

behalf of Alberta families. It also contemplates debtors' existing ability to access these funds in cases of financial hardship. However, the intention in this Legislature in allowing MEP to garnish funds in LIRAs was not realized in practice. Even with the authority granted in the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2004, financial institutions have taken the position that MEP will not receive money from the LIRA garnishment until the debtor is at least 50 years of age and chooses to withdraw the funds.

The amendments before us today will ensure that the intention of the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2004, is fully realized. Specifically, Mr. Speaker, they will allow Alberta families to benefit from funds collected from LIRAs immediately, when the need is most pressing. More importantly, the amendments will ensure that children and families will not have to wait for the debtor to retire before they are paid the support that they are due.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, these amendments will increase access to justice for Albertans. They will also enable MEP to achieve even better results than they have been in recent years, and those achievements are indeed significant. More importantly, they will assist MEP in continuing the work they do in helping Alberta children and families.

I encourage members of this Assembly to support this bill, Mr. Speaker, and at this time I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7

Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to move for second reading Bill 7, Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006.

The amendments are designed to adjust wording to clearly indicate that a personal injury lawsuit involving the motor vehicle accident claims program can be commenced at either the Court of Queen's Bench or Provincial Court. Amended terminology will also indicate that parties have a choice whether or not to be represented by counsel when moving forward with a claim. While some may consider these amendments to be housekeeping, they are, nonetheless, important in our overall goal of improving speedy and efficient access to justice for Albertans.

Before discussing the amendment further, I'd like to give the Assembly a very brief description of the purpose of the motor vehicle accident claims program. The program itself was established in 1947 to protect victims by ensuring that they have recourse to claim against uninsured motorists for their personal injuries. As we are, unfortunately, all too aware, motor vehicle accidents occur in Alberta every day and often involve personal injuries. Because liability for a motor vehicle accident can be very expensive, all vehicle owners and drivers in Alberta are required to have valid liability insurance. Regrettably, there are some who don't, and they also usually don't have the money to pay for the personal injuries that they have caused.

Sometimes the at-fault driver flees the scene of the accident, and the injured party does not know whom to sue. If an accident occurred in Alberta, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act protects victims of uninsured and unknown drivers by ensuring that they have someone from whom to recover damages for personal injury. Mr. Speaker, I do want to clarify that the program is not meant to be a

substitute for private collision insurance and, therefore, cannot be used for property damage claims, only personal injury.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, this program has worked very well for many years, but a fairly recent change to the small claims limit in the province means that people are accessing the program differently. I say fairly recent in that it was in the year 2002 when this province raised the small claims limit from \$7,500 to \$25,000, which just happens to be the highest in the country. The result has increased the use of the Provincial Court for a number of civil matters, including the Alberta motor vehicle accident claims program. Quite simply, with the ability now to recover more for personal injury damages in Provincial Court, more Albertans are opting to go this route as it is often faster, less expensive, and less legally complicated than going through the Court of Queen's Bench.

Mr. Speaker, that's what brings this before the Assembly today. While the personal injury lawsuits involving the motor vehicle accident claims program can be commenced at either the Court of Queen's Bench or Provincial Court, current wording in the act is exclusive to the Court of Queen's Bench. We recognize that depending on the extent of a person's injuries, people may seek higher damages than \$25,000 and therefore need to file their claims in the Court of Queen's Bench. These amendments would not alter in any way their right to do so, but it is our anticipation that people would opt for the more simplified route in order to get their claim dealt with more quickly so that they are able to get on with their lives. As a result of the simplified process, some of these individuals may forgo legal counsel and represent themselves in their litigation.

It is therefore the purpose of the amendments to adopt wording in the act that represents language of both the Provincial Court and the Court of Queen's Bench and make other amendments reflecting the fact that unrepresented litigants may sue under the act. Once again, Mr. Speaker, this bill is to improve access to justice for all Albertans, and I would encourage the members to support Bill 7 as it goes forward.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 8

Trustee Amendment Act, 2006

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Once again it is my pleasure to rise this afternoon to move for second reading Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2006.

In 2001 we made provisions to allow trustees to be more flexible in their approach to investments and to diversify investments and minimize risk. The old approach confined trustees to investing in only those securities that had been identified in the so-called legal list. This method limited the flexibility of trustees in their choice of investments. It was outdated and no longer the best option to ensure that trustees were acting in the best interest of the trust.

Therefore, in keeping with modern theories of investment, we introduced the prudent investor rule to allow trustees more freedom to make good decisions. The goal was to have a reasonable return while avoiding undue risk with the ability to consider the specific circumstances of the trust. We retained the legal list in a schedule to the act for transitional purposes. During the transition trustees of some private trusts that were already in effect when the 2001 amendments came into force continued to be governed by the legal list. Five years later trustees of those pre-existing trusts have had time to become familiar with the 2001 changes, and we are now prepared to remove the legal list entirely from the Trustee Act. With this amendment, unless it specifies otherwise, a trust will be governed by the prudent investor rule no matter when the trust was created.

In addition to the trusts in effect before 2001 there are several acts that also refer to the legal list for the purpose of defining investment powers under those acts. This bill amends those statutes to allow the investment powers to be defined by regulation. The regulations will set out customized investment rules that are appropriate to each act.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage members of the Assembly to support Bill 8 as it moves forward, and at this time I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour and the outstanding progress this afternoon I would move that we now adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]