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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

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The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 17, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome back. I would ask all hon. members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to former colleagues who passed away in recent days.

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

Mrs. Alice Hanson

May 6, 1927, to February 7, 2009

The Speaker: Hon. members, on February 7, 2009, Mrs. Alice Ann Hanson, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, passed away. Alice Hanson was first elected in the election held June 15, 1993, and served until March 10, 1997. During her years of service she represented the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly for the Alberta Liberal Party. During her term of office Alice Hanson served on several select standing committees on Public Accounts, Public Affairs, and Private Bills.

Mr. Nick Dushenski

September 4, 1920, to February 13, 2009

The Speaker: Mr. Nick Dushenski, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, passed away on February 13, 2009, at the age of 88 years. Mr. Dushenski was first elected in the election held August 5, 1952, and served until May 9, 1959. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Willingdon for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, or CCF, Party. During his term of office Nick Dushenski served on several select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Law Amendments; Municipal Law; Public Accounts; Privileges and Elections; and Railways, Telephones and Irrigation.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families, who shared the burdens of public office. Family members of Alice Hanson are with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them. In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. members Mrs. Alice Hanson and Mr. Nick Dushenski as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. I would invite all to join in in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. These guests are family members of our former colleague Alice Hanson. Son Chris Hanson and his spouse, Laura Kemp-Hanson, are joined by their daughter Sabrina and her partner, Trent Wilkie. I would ask you all to receive the warm welcome and the sympathies of this House on the passing of your mother.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you my friend and constituent the hon. Brent Rathgeber, MP for Edmonton-St. Albert, and his partner, Ms Katrina Black. Mr. Rathgeber is a member of the federal justice committee, and knowing that he is a law and order guy, I look forward to his support for Saskatchewan Yorkton-Melville MP Garry Breitkreuz's private member's bill to scrap the decade-old long gun registry. I would invite Brent and Katrina to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of students from Meyonohk elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. These students are participating in the School at the Legislature program this week. I had the privilege of meeting them during the reading week in September and as well in the rotunda just before the session. I would now ask the students, teachers Mr. David Fairfield and Miss Melissa Griswold, and parents Pauline So and Mrs. Gloria Goldthorpe to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a thrill today to introduce 10 of Sherwood Park's finest, the Divine Divas, the Red Hat ladies that have joined us today in the members' gallery. Their names are Marie Rossi, Carole Eastaugh, Maxine Richardson, Ingrid Brisebois, Juanita Brisebois, Gail Matheson, Judy Neuman, Eve Cockle, Shirley Hingley, and Norma Aksenchuk. Would they please rise, and would we all please now give them the warm welcome they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my constituent Mr. Ken Jones. Mr. Jones is not only a good supporter of myself and the community; he also has the distinguished honour of being the deputy fire chief and manager for Strathcona county. Mr. Jones has just today been presented with the Alberta emergency services medal from the hon. Cindy Ady, Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation and long-time friend. It's a great honour. We're all very appreciative of the great services that Mr. Jones has provided our province. He's seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you 10 visitors from the Central Lions senior citizens' association. Central Lions is a newly renovated facility that carries a unique variety of services and activities for seniors throughout Edmonton, and I just happen to be fortunate enough for it to be within my constituency. I would ask the group to please stand and receive the traditional greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

1:40

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Mike Hoffman. Mr. Hoffman is manager of resuscitation education for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT & Nunavut. The Heart and Stroke Foundation is responsible for quality assurance in ensuring the reduction of incidents relating to cardiovascular disease through the provision and continued development of emergency care. Mr. Hoffman is a resident of Viking, Alberta. I'd ask him to stand and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very dedicated group of citizens, mostly from the Turner Valley-Black Diamond area, who have come to the Assembly today to bring their concerns about an overdue cleanup of the Turner Valley gas plant. As I call your name, would you please rise: Judyann Niemi, Sandra McCrone, Bonnie Commandeur, Julie Walker, Hedda Zahner, Sheryl Watson, Bob Niemi, Linda Abrams, and George Wallace, who is also a town councillor from Turner Valley. The group has been organized and headed by Roxanne Walsh. They're standing. If you would please give them the usual warm welcome to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce to you and through you a very special person who has been like a brother to me, my cousin Michael Donovan. He's here in the members' gallery. He's president of Donovan Creative Communications, a very successful company here in Edmonton. I'm happy he came to join me for lunch even though I had to pay. I'd ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the owners, investors, and operators of Green Power Solutions Inc. GPS electricity strives to create new, renewable electricity resources using, quite literally, horsepower. This product has applications for residential farm and business uses. I'd now ask my guests Sukhbir Bachhal, Frank Ignacio, and Jaspal Kalher to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly nine people from the Spirit of Edmonton. This group made history by recreating historic flights in an open cockpit biplane to celebrate 100 years of flight in Alberta. If you've been watching these historic re-creation flights, you'll know that there are few people as dedicated to their cause as these are: two in particular, Mr. Tom Hinderks, my friend, constituent, and pilot; and Mr. Curtis Peters, copilot. However, these two could not have done it alone. Seven other people made this historic celebration possible: Dr. Rod Macleod, Art Breier, Ed Doucette, Dave Heathcote, Bram Tilroe, Greg Mockford, and Nikki Cox. I'll be expanding more upon their roles in this in my member's statement this afternoon. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm greetings of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Black History Month

Mr. Blakett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to stand up in front of this House to talk about Black History Month. As you know, February is Black History Month in Canada and the United States of America. Many people talk with pride about the new President of the United States and the fact that he is the first African-American to hold that office, but Canada has its own rich heritage and traditions with respect to black history as does as Alberta.

A motion was established back in 1995 by the hon. Jean Augustine to create Black History Month as a way of recognizing the contributions that were made by black Canadians in Canada. They're more than escaped slaves and athletes and entertainers. Black Canadians have been explorers, translators, soldiers, scholars, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and, indeed, politicians from a time long before Confederation. Alberta's black pioneer heritage dates back to the mid 19th century, when several black pioneers found jobs in the untamed west. By the turn of the 20th century hundreds of individuals, many accompanied by their families, left their homes in Oklahoma and other nearby states to begin a new life in Canada. Anxious to purchase affordable homesteads offered by the government of Canada and desperate to escape a life of racial strife and discrimination, Alberta's black pioneers travelled north to Manitoba and eventually settled in scattered homesteads throughout northern Alberta.

The rich heritage includes black Americans who established farming communities like Amber Valley, where Samuel and Beulah Carothers brought with them their eight children. Having crossed the Canadian border at Emerson, Manitoba, they continued by train to Edmonton. From Edmonton the family along with several others formed a mule train and travelled another hundred miles to Athabasca Landing, where they blazed a trail to Pine Creek, later known as Amber Valley.

In Breton, where there is now a museum that was built in 1948, there were similar tales, also in Wildwood and Campsie. A heroic figure like southern Alberta rancher John Ware, if you can imagine back to the turn of the 19th century, was actually so revered that a thousand people turned out for his funeral, and many of us would love to be able to do the same today. Our own Jarome Iginla became the first black player in the National Hockey League to be a captain of an NHL team.

Like Alberta's many ethnic and racial groups, black Albertans have carved their unique place in Alberta's history with persistence and courage. I'm proud to be able to stand up here as the first black

minister and to be able to read a ministerial statement on Black History Month. It is also a privilege to be here with the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who was the first black MLA in this House. Like many of these people, Mr. Speaker, I understand what it's like because I moved to Alberta eight and a half years ago to look for a better life for my family. Even though I wasn't running away from racial discrimination, I knew it was a great opportunity to raise my family. We will work hard as members of this Legislature to ensure that future generations of Albertans, having learned the lessons that we have through our black history and the history of many other ethnic groups, strive to make sure that we continue to support the diversity and economic well-being of all Albertans.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure indeed to rise in response to the minister's statement on Black History Month. If I may take this as an opportune moment to congratulate him on his wonderful accomplishment as our first black minister in cabinet.

The minister is correct in noting that the history of black people in Canada is multidimensional. It's a fascinating, sometimes tragic but ultimately uplifting story that continues to this day. As we celebrate the halfway point of Black History Month, we should take special note of the Alberta communities most directly shaped by black Canadians, places like Amber Valley, Breton, Wildwood, and Campsie, all started primarily by groups of black immigrants, many of whom left those communities to fight for Canada in the First World War and who later left those tiny communities hoping to find new opportunities in Alberta's big cities. Black Albertans certainly took full advantage of those opportunities. They have become our teachers, health care professionals, skilled trades, engineers, and community leaders, including, as already mentioned, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who was once the mayor of the city of Leduc. They are entrepreneurs, scientists, lawyers, and artists.

In fact, one of Alberta's black artists is Patricia Darbasie, and I would encourage anyone interested in Alberta's black heritage to check out her play *Ribbon*, a one-woman show she wrote, performed, and directed. *Ribbon* explores the experiences of black pioneers who left the United States to settle in Amber Valley. Originally performed in 2005, *Ribbon* is going to make a comeback to the stage this year.

Black History Month is a time for all of us to reflect on how race, culture, religion, and sexual orientation can sometimes still divide us, even in these relatively enlightened times. We have had black mayors, a black minister. One day we will have a black Premier and Prime Minister, and another day, a little further in the future, such an event won't even be remarkable at all, just another citizen stepping up to serve the people.

Black history teaches us that bitter winters or economic downturns are impartial. They are challenges we must face together as one people united in our efforts to build a better future for our children. Black, white, or red; straight, gay, or transgendered; Christian, Muslim, or atheist; Liberal, Conservative, or socialist: we are all Albertans making history together.

Thank you.

1:50

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I am thinking that you're probably rising to see if permission would be granted by the Assembly to allow your colleague to participate. Hon. members, we're going to need unanimous consent for two

things. One is to allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to participate and, more importantly, to allow us to waive Standing Order 7(1.1), which says that the question period shall start at 1:50. I'm going to ask one question together with the same intent: is anyone opposed? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members of the House. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak about Black History Month. The history of Canada that many of us learned in school had little to say about the contributions of Canadians of African and Caribbean origin, and the world history we learned was really European history. We did not learn much about Africa or its diaspora.

More recently historians have worked to uncover the stories of black Canadians. Through such research we can learn about the black Loyalist settlement in Nova Scotia and men such as John Ware, who played an important part in the early days of ranching in Alberta. We also know other prominent Canadians such as Clarence Miller, better known as "Big" Miller, who was an internationally renowned jazz artist from Edmonton. I had the honour, Mr. Speaker, of meeting Mr. Miller one evening at a black history event a number of years ago, and also I know that the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon was a regular attendee and has been honoured there as well.

There's much yet to be learned about the experiences of black Canadians as communities, as immigrants, as professional businesspeople and artists, and that's an area of history in which we need to know more about Canadians of all origins. That level of history is more difficult to uncover than the lives of notable individuals, but it is an aspect of history that we need to study if we are truly to understand the values that shape our communities. We all benefit from the attention paid this month to the history of black Canadians. It leads to a better understanding for all of us about the world we live in and share with all the peoples of the world.

Thank you very much.

Oral Question Period

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

Peter Lougheed Centre Renovations

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's health care system is in turmoil, and the minister of health is not making a positive contribution to the situation. The minister stated this weekend, and I quote: he is sick and tired of people whining about not enough health care facilities. End quote. My first question to the Premier: does the Premier stand behind the minister's comments?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I stand behind the decisions of this government to invest more than 50 per cent of the total capital fund into one city – and that's the city of Calgary – over the last four years, since 2004. That has been a substantial investment in health care facilities. We're continuing to invest more right across the province of Alberta, if at least once the hon. member would get up and at least acknowledge that in terms of the investment that went in, and we'll continue to do whatever we can to reinvest dollars across Alberta into health care.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When people have genuine concerns with a health care system, a health care system in turmoil, they have a right to be listened to and have their concerns addressed. Will the Premier tell Albertans who they should contact, then, if this minister dismisses unwelcome feedback?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health does not dismiss unwelcome feedback. In fact, he's been travelling the province corner to corner listening to Albertans to see how we can improve the quality of care, access to health care. You've got to remember that we're spending \$13 billion annually – that's about \$36 million a day – and we have to ensure that we constantly work together to improve the system.

In terms of the comments made, the minister can reply to that member in the next question.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the minister of health consider it unreasonable for citizens to demand that capital projects be delivered on time, on budget?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing. This government committed some 222 million dollars to completely build out three floors of the expansion at the Peter Lougheed hospital. We will be completing that project at the end of August. At that time an additional 140 beds will be on stream in the city of Calgary, and that is in addition to all of the other projects that the Premier just mentioned.

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

Health Services in the Calgary Region

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many areas in Alberta – Calgary, Fort Saskatchewan, Grande Prairie – are expressing concerns over proposed delays and lack of funding for hospitals and health services. Communities, both urban and rural, are unsure about the state not only of existing services but planned facilities. To the minister: why will the minister not commit to full completion of the Lougheed expansion when Calgary is already facing capacity limits?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've stated several times in this Legislature that we are in the process of reviewing our overall capital plan for health care. I anticipate that that review will be completed sometime around the delivery of our budget. As the member is obviously well aware, there are significant cost escalations that have occurred in health care projects in this province, and we need to ensure that we are prudent with taxpayers' dollars before committing any additional funds.

Dr. Swann: Will the minister at least commit to a 2011 completion of the south Calgary hospital?

Mr. Liepert: No, Mr. Speaker, I cannot at this time.*

Dr. Swann: The town of Cochrane is facing the distinct possibility of losing radiology services. Why will the minister not support the town of Cochrane in ensuring continuing radiology services there?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that comment is not warranted. This government supports all Albertans in the achievement of equitable health care. What has happened in Cochrane is that there was a private – a private – provider of diagnostic services who has determined that it no longer was cost-effective to operate that facility. We have through the publicly funded health care system plenty of diagnostic facilities in the surrounding area, and the residents of Cochrane will be served very well.

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

Returning Officer Appointments

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This past Friday in testimony to the Legislative Offices Committee the Chief Electoral Officer painted a disturbing picture – and I urge everybody to read the *Hansard* – of the run-up to the last election. He testified that he asked the government for a list of returning officers but was ignored for months. When he finally did get a response, it wasn't from the Premier or a minister but a political operative from the Progressive Conservative Party. My question is to the Premier. Why did the government hand off the selection of returning officers to a PC Party official?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, for that hon. member to ask the question in the House – I thought he was the one that was going to send the Chief Electoral Officer to be reviewed by the Auditor General because he was all upset with the operation of the Chief Electoral Officer. So kind of ironical.

Anyway, when this issue came up about appointing returning officers, even though the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of the Legislature, not of the Premier's office or anybody here – he's an officer of the Legislature – I said: if the Chief Electoral Officer wants to appoint returning officers, go ahead; please take that responsibility. I said that not once but twice. He still hasn't – I don't know – picked up on it, but I guess it's an issue for him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier, then, make an irrevocable commitment in this Legislature today, now, to change the legislation so that the appointment of returning officers is in legislation, put directly and solely in the hands of the Chief Electoral Officer? Will you make that commitment here and now?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of the Legislative Assembly, and all of the recommendations that come forward from the Chief Electoral Officer through the legislative reporting process will come forward to government. We'll scrutinize every one because they are important, because we constantly want to improve democracy in the province of Alberta. We'll take all of the suggestions that come forward, scrutinize them. If it requires legislation, it comes here to the floor of the Assembly at the most appropriate time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I hope everyone noted the Premier did not stick to his commitment.

My last question is again to the Premier. Given that a PC member, who left Friday's meeting early, stated unequivocally that

*See p. 99, right col., para. 10

the Chief Electoral Officer's contract would not be renewed, has the government directed its members to terminate the Chief Electoral Officer's job because he spoke out about the role of the PC Party in appointing returning officers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't make the decision on the employment of the Chief Electoral Officer. He has a contract. That contract was agreed to by the Legislative Offices Committee of this Assembly. He's responsible and answers to the Legislative Offices Committee. Both sides of the House nominate members to that committee; they make that decision.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, very much in the same vein my questions are to the Premier. The last election in this province was a shambles. Nearly a quarter of Albertans were left off the voters list, disorganization was everywhere, and irregularities were widespread. It's clear that the Tory patronage system and the government's failure to provide lists of local returning officers until the last minute are to blame. The question to the Premier: instead of blaming scapegoats, why won't the Premier take responsibility and end control of Alberta's election machinery by the Tory party and do it right now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, during the last election the Chief Electoral Officer received the names of nominees for the position. He interviewed each and every one of them. He had refused some of the nominations. He might have hired new people as returning officers on his own. That process was in place, and I believe he must have been following that process in preparing for the election.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I don't know who the Premier is kidding. It's well known that the government was repeatedly asked to supply lists and failed to do so until the last minute, so the Chief Electoral Officer was unable to organize an enumeration because the Tory party didn't supply the names until the last minute. Having just conducted a leadership contest, the PC Party did not need a new voters list to identify its support, putting the other parties at a very large disadvantage. Will the Premier admit that this government sabotaged the enumeration to give his party an advantage in the last election?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the member makes, actually, a very serious allegation in this House, and I would ask him to reconsider what he just said. First of all, you know, he can play politics to a degree because he has the immunity of this House, but if he's saying that some list that I had in my possession of those people that bought memberships in the PC Party to vote for me obstructed the succeeding election, I can't put those two together. I'd have him reconsider what he just said because we're treading on very serious ground here.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier commit to ensuring free and fair elections in Alberta by ensuring that legislation is changed so that it is the Chief Electoral Officer that is responsible for appointing local returning officers and do it now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I've said it at least twice, perhaps three times. When the issue first came up, I said – for whatever reason, it

was like the government preventing it. I said to the Chief Electoral Officer: if you want the responsibility, go ahead; take it off our hands. Especially when, you know, you're trying to find people to work, to dedicate months to this particular role for the Chief Electoral Officer, it does take a considerable amount of sacrifice on behalf of those that do sign up. It is a very important responsibility. To tell you the truth, it was difficult to find people to do that, but we did. We worked with the Chief Electoral Officer. He interviewed all the people, made sure that they were trained well, and they did the job extremely well in this last election.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. member for Calgary-Varsity.

Peter Lougheed Centre Renovations (continued)

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Peter Lougheed Centre serves the fastest growing quadrant of the city of Calgary. In 2005 this government allocated \$222 million to fund the expansion of this facility. However, it appears that the funding is insufficient for the completion of this project. The residents of northeast Calgary are concerned that this noncompletion will affect the quality of the services that they will be receiving. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: when can we expect funding to come through so that northeast residents can access the quality services that they deserve?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, there was inaccuracy in the preamble, Mr. Speaker. This government committed \$222 million to complete the project, which was the completion of three floors in the expansion of the Peter Lougheed Centre. I want to also ensure that the hon. member doesn't leave the impression that somehow residents of northeast Calgary are not receiving quality health care. The Peter Lougheed hospital has been in existence for some – I don't know – 15, 20 years now, and what this expansion will do is add another 140 beds.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three of the six floors of the expansion appear to be unfunded. If a project is incomplete, then the services will be inadequate. In the throne speech Albertans heard that there is \$6 billion in the capital account allotted to infrastructure plans, including hospitals. To the same minister: will any of these funds be allocated for the completion of the Calgary Peter Lougheed Centre?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I answered that question earlier in question period. I cannot project what will be in the budget that will be introduced in this House.

However, I think it is very important to recognize what has been committed to health care in the city of Calgary in the last four years. Let me read this list: the South Calgary health campus, \$1.4 billion; the McCaig tower at the Foothills medical centre, \$389 million; the east addition to the Peter Lougheed Centre, \$247 million; the Highwood Tower expansion at the Rockyview general hospital, \$227 million; the Sheldon Chumir health centre in downtown Calgary, \$95 million. I'll finish it in the next answer, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The first floor is supposed to be the busy emergency room within the

hospital as well as provide access to the other already developed floors. However, it is sitting as an empty shell. Can the minister commit to providing funding for the first floor in the very immediate future for at least a partial operation of the expansion?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is somehow an impression left that emergency services are not being provided today at the Peter Lougheed hospital, and that is not correct. The Peter Lougheed hospital has had emergency services since the day it opened. Is the emergency facility in the right place? Maybe not. But as we will soon find out when the minister of finance brings forward a budget, much to the amazement of our friends in the opposition the money flow has stopped.

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

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's children and youth are the most valuable and amongst our most vulnerable members of society. I'm sure that the minister charged with the protection of children and youth in Alberta has been informed of the disturbing allegations of abuse raised by CBC's *The Fifth Estate* program this past Friday concerning the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, AARC, in Calgary. To the minister: if AARC is, in fact, a recipient of government funding for the treatment of drug- and alcohol-addicted children and youth in Alberta, how many hundreds of thousands of public dollars has this private institute received?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did see the story that you are referring to, and I have to say that it is concerning to hear those kinds of allegations. It's certainly my job to encourage people to come forward with their allegations of abuse. I also want to say that I've heard from many families who have used AARC after terrible years and have seen some great success. I think the most important thing is that in terms of AARC my department does not have any capabilities or mandate to license nonresidential addiction treatment centres, so you may want to direct your questions to health.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The end does not justify the means.

Again to the minister: please explain if and how AARC, a recipient of public funding, is licensed and monitored to ensure that children and youth are safe and assure us that public dollars are actually helping, not harming, children and youth. If you're not able to provide those answers, I would pass it to the minister of health.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'll answer that question. The Department of Health and Wellness through the former AADAC agency does provide funding to AARC. It receives about \$300,000 annually. The service is accredited by the Canadian Accreditation Council of Human Services.

I didn't have the opportunity to see the particular production, but I can tell you that you can talk to many people who have gone through the program in Calgary, and I'm not so sure that they would necessarily agree with this Mother Corp program out of Toronto.

Mr. Chase: I think you should be looking in the mirror at your own accountability rather than the public broadcaster.

Will the Minister of Health and Wellness, whose superboard has taken over for the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, reveal to Albertans what other unlicensed and unmonitored programs his ministry funds with public dollars?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think what is important here is that the member, who happens to be from Calgary, jumps on every opportunity he can to criticize that city and the volunteers who do outstanding work in that city. I will leave it up to him to not stand in this House and make these comments. Go back to Calgary, go to the AARC facility and make those comments in the AARC facility. He's pretty brave when he stands here, Mr. Speaker. I challenge him to go right to Calgary, to the AARC facility, and make those comments.

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

Summer Temporary Employment Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the current economic situation the youth in my constituency have expressed concerns about job prospects this upcoming summer. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What is your department doing to increase the chances of these youths finding employment this summer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're making the summer temporary employment program even bigger and better this year. We've added more resources, and more jobs will be supported. The increase will be 450 new positions over last year. I know that last year we didn't have enough positions to cover all the demand, so we have added more positions this year. We provide \$7 an hour to help not-for-profit employers top up their STEP employees' wages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplement to the same minister: what kind of job experience can young Albertans expect to gain from a STEP employer?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, STEP positions offer a tremendously wide range of jobs, from university researchers in the areas of science, the environment, and medicine to caseworkers in criminal, civil, and family law as well as even tourism ambassadors or heritage interpreters with not-for-profit museums. These jobs provide summer experiences for young people that might lead to long-term careers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. What is the benefit of this program to Alberta employers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the wage subsidy, STEP helps employers find very enthusiastic workers with fresh ideas, some new perspectives. The program can also result in an employer

finding a future full-time employee. So this is win-win for both employers and employees.

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

Oil Sands Development Strategy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One thing that can be said for this government is that they like drafting strategies. But they always forget one key component: actual implementation. The oil sands strategy is a complicated matrix and one of so many plans that have been released that no one is sure exactly how it all fits together. My questions are to the President of the Treasury Board. Given that over the years we've seen the SREM commitment, the Radke report, water for life, the energy strategy, and the land-use framework, what's new with the oil sands strategy? Particularly, which takes precedence to provide maximum protection for the environment?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear and has been very clear that in this government Environment takes responsibility to ensure that we manage our environment appropriately. The land-use framework merely identifies all the players that are involved in the development of the oil sands as a whole. The responsibility for funding for infrastructure remains with Transportation, land use with SRD, health issues with the health minister. This simply is the organization that brings them all focused on one path.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister. Given that oil sands production is targeted to reach 3 million barrels per day by 2015 and lease sales currently cover 65,000 square kilometres, with more in the pipeline, can the minister tell us if any of these new strategies apply retroactively; in other words, to what's already in the pipeline or only to new projects?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the land-use framework applies to what we're doing going forward. It just doesn't make sense to say that 20 per cent is the right number to set aside. Go find out what the biodiversity is that we need to protect and then implement it as we go forward. We can't change the past, but we can learn from it. The Department of Environment working with the Department of Energy has identified that we're going to change how we deal with tailings ponds. That's a go-forward. We can spend time dwelling in the past or use this document and go forward.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister. Given that government has already rejected calls from CEMA to suspend new lease sales in sensitive areas, thereby establishing conservation offsets, why is the government including the same recommendation in the new oil sands strategy? You've already said no to it once. Now you're going to say yes to it when you propose it? Explain how that works.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure if the hon. member means that you get more done by listening to people who aren't very positive or sure about what they want or who are more negative. Or do you sit down with people who would like to see balanced, environmentally responsible progress, like industry, like the municipalities, like the environmental groups that want to work to make it better? We don't put all of the report onto a single entity. It's not an industry report. It's not an environment report. It's an all-encompassing report.

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

Peter Lougheed Centre Renovations

(continued)

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. This past weekend, as we know, there were several reports about construction at the Peter Lougheed Centre. Many of the reports indicated that Calgary was somehow being shortchanged. Can the minister explain to my constituents and to Calgarians the rationale for only completing three of the floors at the Peter Lougheed Centre?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this will probably give me an opportune time to let Calgarians know what else we've invested in this city in the last five to eight years. I remind the hon. member that we just a few years ago opened the new Alberta Children's hospital, which cost taxpayers \$241 million. There's the south diagnostic treatment centre, at \$10 million; the Okotoks community health centre, at \$10 million; the Wing Kei centre, at 4 and a half million dollars. I could go on, but it's all documented in government budget documents. I guess all I can say is that we will make decisions as a caucus. The decisions on capital planning in this government will not be made by contractors and columnists.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I'd like to shed more light on this issue rather than heat. I'm just wondering if this is standard practice. What criteria are used to determine whether a facility is fully built out or not?

Mr. Liepert: Under the previous regional health authorities, Mr. Speaker, each regional health authority provided us with their three-year capital plan, and then it was aggregated across the province and then budgeted for. We've been working closely with Alberta Health Services to ensure that the capital we do invest meets the way we need to deliver health care in the 21st century, and that is an ongoing process. In this particular case, as I've mentioned previously in question period, 140 beds will come on stream at the end of August.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the hon. President of the Treasury Board. Alberta has invested significantly in capital infrastructure over the past several years to a tune of approximately three times over the average of most Canadian provinces. Many of these capital projects are seen as one-time investments, but in reality capital projects have ongoing operational costs. To the hon. President of the Treasury Board: before capital infrastructure projects are approved and funded, does the government assess the long-term operational costs of the project?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, yes, we do. Have we done a good enough job in the past of identifying all of the costs that go with institutions? Probably not, and the difference is extreme. If it's a replacement hospital, for example, you may save money in operational costs from better heating and better efficiencies, so there may not be as great a cost. If it's a new hospital or a teaching hospital or a specialized hospital, like Mazankowski, or one with research components, the operating costs, obviously, are higher. We try to

put as much of the information as we have into the equation so that the departments can budget on a go-forward basis for new capital projects.

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

Turner Valley Gas Plant

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1988 the Alberta government bought the Turner Valley gas plant for its historical significance. However, they have ignored the very real problem of the plant contaminating water sources. Citizens have had to struggle with the government to take real action for years, and they are here today looking for answers. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Government documents state that the ministry has accepted responsibility for the historical preservation of the site and also responsibility for the cleanup, so why has the government abdicated its responsibility to ensure proper cleanup of the site to residential parkland standards?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member has mentioned, we did take responsibility under Culture and Community Spirit for remediation of the site. We spent over \$11 million to ensure that there was a membrane and a boundary put in to make sure that no contaminants were exposed to the Sheep River. We have remediated the site in parts to residential standards and in some to industrial standards. The residential standards are for those areas that people will be walking through. It hasn't been determined what we're going to do with the site in its complexity. Right now, until we make a decision, we're not going to go and spend an untold amount of dollars to make sure that we remediate that to a residential site if it's not prudent.

Ms Blakeman: Well, back to the same minister: how long are these residents expected to wait while the department figures all of this out? When are you going to make a decision and implement an actual plan that will help the people living there?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's amazing. The hon. member should know that right now we're in tough economic times not only in Canada but throughout the world. It's prudent right now to see where we're going forward as a government to determine what our priorities are on expenditures. We have made sure that the site is safe and that the site is contained. When we are in a position to be able to go forward, if we're able to go forward, then we'll make that decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Well, my next question, then, will be to the Minister of Energy. How on earth, if the government cannot even clean up one little historical site after 21 years, can anybody believe that the government would be capable of cleaning up the oil sands or a tailings pond or a strip mine or an abandoned well or anything else? How can we possibly take you seriously when you can't even clean up one little historical site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, Albertans can see the difference between a plan that the Alberta government has put together cross ministry – SRD, Environment, Energy, and others in this government – to address environmental

issues that we have relative to our production. Albertans can see the difference between a positive plan like that and some rhetoric that's hyped by somebody that wants to create an issue that isn't there.

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

Peter Lougheed Centre Renovations

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend when the minister of health was criticized for failing to complete upgrades to the Peter Lougheed Centre in Calgary, he petulantly replied that he was, quote, sick and tired of his, quote, whining constituents. Actually, it's Calgarians who should be sick and tired. This minister is failing them, and when they called him on it, he acted like a bully.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

Ms Notley: His name-calling is an embarrassment to every other member of this government. To the minister of health: why won't you apologize for calling Albertans whiners?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the member lives in Edmonton so probably didn't have the opportunity to read the quote as it was. In fairness, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who is also a resident of Calgary, actually got the quote correct. Quite frankly, I'm not even going to respond to the question.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's pretty clear that Albertans were called whiners by this minister. The Peter Lougheed Centre expansion project has turned into this health minister's personal bridge to nowhere. It's an empty shell: no ground floor, no upper floors, no permanent emergency room, and no capacity to deliver the essential health services expected from an upgraded hospital. As I noted, when he was questioned, he called people whiners. To the minister of health: why won't you accept responsibility and apologize to these Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, maybe the member needs to take a look at how some of those questions are asked and determine who I may have been referring to and who I may have not been referring to. What I was referring to was not the vast majority of Calgarians who recognize and appreciate the investment we have made in that particular city in health care. It certainly wasn't the 60,000 constituents of mine, which she alleged that I claimed were whiners. You know, we have a couple sitting over in the corner right there, and they're doing a good job of it right now.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the Premier. His minister just implied that the only people who might deserve an apology are those who agree with this government's proposals and that those who might actually say that they need more in health care deserve to be called whiners. Will the Premier ask his minister to apologize to the Albertans that this minister called whiners for raising legitimate concerns about health care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the member is a lawyer, I guess, by profession. You and I can read the same thing, but if we're both lawyers, we have different interpretations. I thought I'd get a laugh out of that, but I guess not.

You know, how much time of the Assembly is spent here actually debating what was said, what wasn't said, what did you mean? The fact is that the original plan called for six storeys. The first three storeys to provide 140 beds: that'll be completed this year. The

other three: while the crane is at the hospital, rather than dismantling it and bringing it back later, we shelled in another three floors for future expansion. That to me, Mr. Speaker, is a very good capital plan.

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

Victims Restitution and Compensation Legislation

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not a whiner, but I do have a question today. Albertans are growing increasingly concerned about gang-related violence in their communities. In Calgary alone there have been several shootings since the beginning of this year linked to organized crime, including one that claimed the life of an innocent bystander in my constituency. My first question is to the Minister of Justice. We are all very proud of the passing of Bill 50 last session, but how will Alberta's new Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act address the growing problem of gang activity?

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to stand here and provide some information to the House with respect to the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act. This legislation, of course, was a tremendous success for this House, which supported it unanimously. It was a co-operative effort between chiefs of police, Crown prosecutors, and people in the community, who know that drugs are a problem. Drugs lead to a great deal of violence. Anything we can do to try to help the police to stop this activity from taking place and to pre-empt criminal activity is going to be a success for this province, and that is what we've done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:30

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. How does this legislation differ from powers already available to police and prosecutors pursuant to the Criminal Code?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is important legislation because what we did last year as part of our safe communities initiatives was sit down with police officers, and police officers told us that while the Criminal Code did give them some powers, they needed to be able to pre-empt this criminal activity. They know what's going on on the streets, and they need to be able to stop criminals who they anticipate will also get involved in violent crime. This legislation has allowed them to do that. Since it was proclaimed, on the 16th of December, we've had tremendous success in seizing property, all sorts of property, and it's stopped people who are committing crimes from profiting from their business.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the same minister: is this simply legislation on paper, or is this being put into action?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had tremendous success with this legislation. We've strengthened the civil forfeiture office in Calgary and in Edmonton. We've dedicated special prosecutors to this activity. We've provided resources to police agencies in the major cities. We've made sure that the police have the resources that they need to seize property. We have been able to seize a tremendous amount of property, and over the next couple of weeks we'll be able to announce exactly how successful this has been in dollar values.

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

Third-quarter Fiscal Update

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer, when the surplus was projected to be 8 and a half billion dollars, the finance minister said, and I quote, you don't wear the bearskin till you've shot the bear, end quote, as a rebuke to those who were demanding that the government plan for the future by reducing spending and increasing savings. Well, the bear is alive and well as I speak. The minister took aim, fired, and missed her target by a mile. To the minister of finance: since the minister is so concerned with getting the story right, as she puts it, before announcing the budget date – and that's good; budgets shouldn't start with the words "once upon a time" – when will the third-quarter update be released to at least give Albertans some idea of where our economic future is headed?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the third-quarter update, as it always does, will come at the end of this month, and in due course we'll publicize the date and the time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will the minister be announcing the savings plan that the Mintz report stated was necessary in order to avoid huge tax increases in the years to come?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in the future, again, I will make sure that the hon. member gets adequate information so he's aware of when we will talk further about our response to the investment and savings strategy.

Mr. Taylor: Gosh, Mr. Speaker, is that going to be, like, a private conversation, or is she going to share it with the people of Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we always publicize the dates. I thought that perhaps the hon. member was concerned that he might miss it, so I'd be very pleased to just make sure that he gets a call to let him know.

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

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Legislation

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December 2008 the new Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act received royal assent. Despite extensive public hearings by the Standing Committee on Health and a report that was tabled in the House with recommendations that were accepted by government, I continue to hear from constituents expressing concerns that the legislation removes the right of represented individuals to make their own decisions. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Are my constituents' concerns well founded?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would like to set the record straight. The Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act is a very good piece of legislation. It is designed to enhance the protection of Albertans who are not able to make their own decisions. The act was created in the best interest of those who need it most, focusing on a least-intrusive approach to respecting Albertans' right to make decisions for themselves for as long as possible. This act increases the choices available to people who need help making decisions, providing a continuum of choices. The AGTA presumes adults are capable of making their own decisions until proven otherwise.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that. An additional concern of my constituents is that the legislation did not go far enough to address the potential abuse – physical, financial, and otherwise – of elderly Albertans and persons with disabilities. To the minister: what measure specifically is her department taking to address this issue?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the abuse of vulnerable citizens is a huge concern of this government, and we are taking real, measurable steps to continue to protect them through three new pieces of legislation. The new Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act makes improvements by requiring more safeguards to protect assisted or represented adults, the new Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act will help ensure that Albertans receive quality accommodation and services and requires operators to adhere to the accommodation standards, and the Protection for Persons in Care Act will continue to ensure the safety of all Albertans in care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the same minister. The final and most frequent concern my constituents express pertains to capacity assessment and the question of criteria and who specifically will be permitted to perform capacity assessment. The legislation left this issue to regulation. I'd like to ask the minister if she'd advise the House what progress her department's making to enhance the capacity assessment process?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the new AGTA provides for a more standardized capacity assessment model, that includes informing the adult about the purpose of the assessment and their rights to refuse to participate if they wish. The capacity assessor meets with the adult and conducts an in-depth interview after ensuring that a medical evaluation has been conducted. In addition, training is being provided to capacity assessors, and guidelines will be publicly available to further standardize and enhance the capacity assessment process. Once the new AGTA is declared later this year, it will replace the 30-year-old Dependent Adults Act.

Taser Use by Law Enforcement Personnel

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, recent survey data from the University of California showed a sixfold increase in deaths among detainees during the first year after California police departments deployed tasers. The RCMP recently toughened guidelines to restrict deployment of tasers unless there is an immediate danger to an officer or a member of the public. Will the Solicitor General commit to imposing these same standards for Alberta enforcement agencies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to inform the hon. member and all members of this House and all Albertans that Alberta already has some of the strictest guidelines regarding the use of tasers, certainly in North America. We will continue to review those, and if there's a need to change them, we will. That being said, they're doing the job.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, last month the minister reported that 100 X26 tasers could be tested per week at a cost of \$15,000. Can the minister inform Albertans how many of the remaining 300 tasers have been tested?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated a couple of weeks ago, we have tested the first hundred of the 340 tasers that are the X26 model. We're reviewing the results of that first 100 that have been tested, and when that review is completed, we will decide what course of action to take to test the remainder.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given the University of California study and given the fact that these X26 tasers could be firing outside of range, wouldn't it be more prudent for the Solicitor General to simply pull these tasers off the street and commit to not putting them on the street until they are tested?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, again, when we made the decision to allow those 340 tasers to remain in active use, we balanced that against the risk of somebody getting a jolt that would exceed 50,000 volts. When you weigh that against the fact that in Alberta since 2005 that particular instrument has been used 2,300 times, there have been two deaths that have been associated with the use of that instrument. That being said, there are probably hundreds of lives that have been saved because the only alternative in a number of these instances would have been lethal force.

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

Livestock and Meat Strategy

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development announced a new direction to facilitate the sustained success of our livestock and meat industry when he announced the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. This strategy was met with reservation from several of my constituents. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: is there now broad support for the strategy, and can my constituents be assured that the industry-wide consultation is going on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly am confident in saying that, yes, there is support through Alberta's livestock and meat industry, and it continues to grow. It certainly is growing with support from the federal government. The industry's involvement is absolutely critical to creating a more profitable future. A number of industry advisory committees have been formed to ensure that industry input is there for us as we move forward. I also met with a group of producers from the hon. member's constituency last week to discuss exactly these problems.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the greatest concerns for my constituents is the mandatory component of age verification. To the same minister: is industry still concerned about this component, and why is it so critical that livestock be age verified?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, industry clearly demonstrated its support for the initiative. Earlier this month we announced that more than 83 per cent of the calf crop, or about 1.5 million calves, has now been age verified. Key markets, including many of the Asian countries, now insist that all animals be age verified. We now will have a critical mass for the offshore markets as they become available. The federal government has recently secured an agreement in principle for the sale of age-verified beef in Hong Kong, so we have to be able to provide assurances to these markets on food safety and traceability.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. Many primary producers feel that the responsibility to age verify rests completely on their shoulders, yet it's the upstream industry players like feedlots and packing plants that reap the benefits and the premium. To the same minister: is there an unfair balance here? What's the benefit that cow-calf producers will see when they age verify their beef?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right: cow-calf producers are the ones that are age verifying their animals. But everyone in the value chain will reap the benefits of this, including the cow-calf producers. As I said before, 83 per cent of the calves are now age verified. Age verification will and already has allowed some new markets to open. Increased market access means more demand for the products and increased profits, and it means a future for our industry. The status quo just was not working.

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

Recruitment of Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week in this House we asked the Minister of Employment and Immigration about a proposed trip to Germany to recruit workers to this country. We find out that the only firm from Alberta that is interested in attending at this time is from Edmonton, and they are trying to recruit five cabinetmakers. My first question is to the minister. How much is this trip to recruit these five cabinetmakers going to cost the taxpayers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the exact details of how much it's going to cost us. I want to mention to the member that Alberta has been working with the German government on recruitment since the year 2000. Over the years – and that comes and goes – we've had as many as 40 employers from across Canada participate in the job fair. This year we've got less, and we anticipate that these will vary from year to year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that Service Canada on their jobfutures.ca website

advertises current conditions for cabinetmakers as having limited work prospects because the hourly wages are below the average and the unemployment rate is 10 per cent, above the 2004 average of 7 per cent, when there are limited job opportunities for cabinetmakers now, why are you spending tax dollars recruiting cabinetmakers in Germany? It doesn't make sense.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate the fact that in order to get a federal permit to hire a foreign worker, a Canadian company needs to show that it has made every effort to find workers locally. Participants, certainly, are down in the fair that we are going to in Germany, and it's sort of a reflection of what's happening. But those individuals are short five cabinetmakers, so they are going over to find them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no doubt in this hon. member's mind that the Premier certainly needs a good cabinetmaker because the present composition over there is a little bit lax, including the hon. member in that department. You're certainly not doing your work.

Before you scheduled that visit to Germany, to Essen and Leipzig, why did you not look at Service Canada's outline and see that we do not need any cabinetmakers from abroad because of the current conditions, as advertised on the Service Canada website?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the Canada job fair is a partnership that we have between the governments of Germany and Alberta and with many other provinces in Canada. Germany will identify areas where they've got surplus workers; we identify areas where we've got a lack of workers. The employer participating does pay a fee to be there to offset costs. Generally our travel costs, if I remember, tend to be around the \$4,000 mark to send a few of our employees over there to do that. That is what we're doing in Germany at this stage.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses. In 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

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

Spirit of Edmonton Flight

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The year 2009 is the 100th anniversary of aviation in Alberta. The Alberta aviation heritage museum, located in the City Centre Airport in the Edmonton-Calder constituency, has taken on a fascinating project to honour our aviation heritage. They have re-created both the first airmail flight from Winnipeg to Edmonton and, most recently, the diphtheria vaccine flight to Fort Vermilion, which I understand we will be hearing more about in a moment.

Many of us have flown in small, enclosed aircraft in the winter; none, I suspect, have flown in an open cockpit biplane at 20 below zero. When you take the wind chill from the propeller into account, it is absolutely remarkable that the aircrew were able to survive the journey. It explains, too, why my friend Tom chose to sit in the back.

This tells us a lot about aviation enthusiasts in Edmonton today and in the past, and it tells us that they are extremely dedicated to their cause. It also tells us a great deal about the value people place

on being able to make aviation a public event. International media attention was paid to that tiny airplane and those two intrepid pilots. The community kicked in the money, the van, the repairs, and the fuel.

Mr. Speaker, it is no accident that Edmonton-Calder should be home to the *Spirit of Edmonton*. Aviation is key to my constituency and to this province, so it is great to see nine people celebrate this province's rich history and engaging Albertans in this celebration. They are truly connecting Alberta's past with its future, and I thank them for doing so.

The Speaker: As the flight went north to Peace River, I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Peace River.

Spirit of Edmonton Flight

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week I had the honour to visit the community of Fort Vermilion and partake in the re-creation of the mercy flight. It marks a series of events that began in December of 1928, when Mr. Bert Logan, the Hudson's Bay Company factor, was taken ill in the community of Little Red River. His wife, who was a nurse, recognized what she thought were the symptoms of diphtheria and, greatly alarmed, dispatched Billy and Bobby Gray to drive a team of horses up the river to Fort Vermilion. It took three days. They had to probe the ice ahead of the horses to make sure the river would bear the weight. They returned, another three-day trip, with Dr. Hamman, who confirmed the diagnosis of diphtheria. Three days back again to the village of Fort Vermilion, where Dr. Hamman dispatched Joe Lafleur and William Lambert to drive a dog team up the river to Peace River, a 12-day journey, all of which occurred in 30 and 40 below weather.

Once the Peace River authorities were alerted, they contacted authorities in Edmonton. Pilots Wop May and Vic Horner were dispatched in an open cockpit biplane and flew with no instruments, no maps up to the community of Fort Vermilion with stops in McLennan and Peace River, an unbelievable feat, Mr. Speaker, re-created by two of the gentlemen sitting in the gallery opposite in just phenomenal conditions of brutal turbulence and cold weather just this past week.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, it's quite a remarkable series of events marked by the feats of remarkable people. It's remarkable in one instance in that it's the first use of aircraft in Canada for a medical emergency and, of course, the first time that the Edmonton City Centre Airport was used in a medical emergency.

We in the north have come since that event to rely on the Edmonton City Centre Airport, and medevac flights from the north are a crucial part of our health care infrastructure. We'd sure like to see it continue, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Heart Month

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February is more than Valentine's Day and Family Day; it's Heart Month. During this month organizations like the Heart and Stroke Foundation focus on raising awareness of heart disease and informing Albertans of the risks and warning signs associated with heart disease.

A heart attack is caused by the interruption of blood flow to the heart. A stroke is caused by the interruption of flow to the brain or the rupture of blood vessels in the brain. It's estimated that 70,000 Canadians have heart attacks and 50,000 have strokes each year.

Today our children are at greater risk of developing heart disease. Youth obesity rates are increasing while activity levels are decreasing. In Alberta about 22 per cent of children and youth are overweight or obese. Kids as young as six are being diagnosed with high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. This can be prevented by having a healthy diet and a more active lifestyle.

The government of Alberta supports the Heart and Stroke Foundation by encouraging Albertans to stay healthy, make wise nutritional choices, and maintain an active lifestyle.

Please join me in congratulating the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT & Nunavut for raising awareness of heart disease and stroke and for the contributions they have made towards achieving their goal of eliminating death and disability from heart disease and stroke, and a special thank you again, Mr. Speaker, to Mr. Mike Hoffman, who was in here earlier today.

Thank you.

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

West Edmonton Skateboard Park

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was honoured to participate in an announcement last week regarding funding for the west Edmonton skateboard park. Our government, through the major community facilities program, is providing a matching grant of \$415,000 to help with the construction of this park. Now, this might seem like your average funding announcement, but this project is a testimony to the strength and the spirit of our communities and to what can be accomplished when we work together. It's an example that we all have the power to make a difference no matter how old we are.

The idea behind this skateboard park came from some teenagers in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung. These young people saw a need for kids to have a safe place to skateboard. They went door to door to raise money. They got not one but four community leagues interested and involved: the Callingwood-Lyburn Community League, the Lessard community league, the Willowby Community League, and the Westridge/Wolf Willow community league. That sparked interest from the city of Edmonton and our government.

Mr. Speaker, these young people had a dream, and they have worked hard to see it realized. People of all ages will benefit from their efforts when the park opens this summer. I'm delighted our government has been able to help support the communities of west Edmonton and add to our quality of life through this important community investment program.

Thank you.

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

Volunteer Community Policing Patrols

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So many of us go to sleep at night unaware of the many services that protect our safety. These services also protect us from crime. We forget the hard work 24 hours a day that the police service, sometimes under dangerous and stressful conditions, accomplishes. The police across the province are assisted in their duties by many volunteers, who help with community-based policing by providing extra eyes and ears for crime prevention.

The Ottewell community patrol in Edmonton-Gold Bar was one of the first volunteer community patrols. It started in 1993. In April 2008 the patrol changed its name to the Southeast Central Community Patrol to better represent the southeast-central neighbourhoods of the fine city of Edmonton.

In the last 15 years the Southeast Central Community Patrol can take credit for many things, including 39 warrants executed, 105 arrests confirmed, 566 patrols completed, 2,352 suspicious persons reported, over 31,000 hours volunteered, and over 293,000 kilometres driven protecting our communities. The volunteers continue to patrol 15 communities and 14 industrial areas in southeast Edmonton. The volunteer patrol welcomes new members who are willing to contribute time, energy, and their own vehicles and gas expenses in exchange for the satisfaction of helping the Edmonton Police Service keep our neighbourhoods safer.

Community patrols across the province, Mr. Speaker, need more volunteers. Interested citizens over 18 years old need only contact their local police to apply. I would urge all hon. members of this Legislature to consider a tax credit for citizens who volunteer for community crime prevention patrols. This provincial tax credit could really help community patrols recruit needed volunteers.

Thank you.

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

National Homelessness Conference

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to let you and other members of the Assembly know that tomorrow the University of Calgary is hosting the second annual National Homelessness Conference, which will bring together 800 of Canada's leading experts in the field of homelessness. This three-day conference will provide an opportunity for policy-makers, researchers, service providers, and people experiencing homelessness to come together and share research, ideas, and best practices.

Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to attending this important conference along with the MLA from Red Deer-North, and I'm pleased to inform the House that the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs is a keynote speaker at the conference and is participating in the panel discussion on policies and issues related to homelessness. Several members of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, including Dr. Gayla Rogers, dean of the Faculty of Social Work and my former professor at the U of C, and Mr. Larry Scarbeau, executive director of the Alberta secretariat, will deliver presentations at the conference.

Homelessness, Mr. Speaker, is a matter of great concern for Albertans. We know that there are ranges of factors both structural and personal which can result in someone being homeless. We also know that managing homelessness through a network of emergency shelters will not break the homeless cycle for people. As the number of homeless people increases across the country, so does the cost to communities and governments to care for these individuals. Many of Alberta's municipalities and Alberta governments have been developing 10-year plans to end homelessness as we know it today in our province. This is important work, and I commend the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs and hundreds of Albertans who have contributed thousands of hours to resolving homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a province built by inspiration, hard work, and communities caring for friends, family, and neighbours. Alberta is moving aggressively to end homelessness. I would like to ask the Assembly to join me in wishing all organizers and delegates a very successful conference.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My guests in the public gallery have waited a long time. I am very pleased to

present on their behalf a petition with some 2,130 names on it. Most of the signatures are from people living in Turner Valley, Black Diamond, and Okotoks, all very fine places in southern Alberta. These members are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government "to ensure that sources of contamination at the Turner Valley Gas Plant site are properly identified and the site is remediated and reclaimed in accordance with Alberta Environment's standards for residential and parkland land use." Thank you very much for all your hard work.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of nine reports from long-term care workers indicating specific instances of shifts that were short staffed, including one report which shows residents were served their breakfast late and cold because of the lack of staff that day.

3:00

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling today. This is from earlier in question period. It's from jobfutures.ca. It's the current conditions for employment for cabinetmakers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're now up against Standing Order 7(7): "at 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." However, there's one aspect that we have to deal with, and that has to do with points of order and points of privilege. The chair will exercise the authority given to him under Standing Order 2 to call on the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to deal with the point of order he wanted to raise.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(h): a Member will be called to order by the Speaker if that member "makes allegations against another Member."

Earlier today in question period the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona stated:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend when the minister of health was criticized for failing to complete upgrades to the Peter Lougheed Centre in Calgary, he petulantly replied that he was, quote, sick and tired of his, quote, whining constituents.

Like all members in this Assembly and, I would hope, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I take my constituents very seriously, and I take what they say very seriously. Under no circumstances did I make that quote.

I would expect that this member, with the legal training that she has, would have verified those accusations before uttering them. In fact, I would like to table five copies of a *Calgary Herald* article which seems to have been the main research document for the two opposition parties today for question period. In it I am quoted as saying that I'm sick and tired of people whining about not enough health care facilities in this city.

Unless this member can provide me with additional quotes that I didn't make but may have been alleged to have made, I would ask that she withdraw those comments. I would even suggest that she might be apologizing to me rather than me apologizing to her.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't aware that this was coming up.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. You were aware because the hon. minister raised it during the question period.

Ms Notley: Sorry. I must have missed it then, Mr. Speaker. Nonetheless, I will say this much in looking over my questions, that I may have forgotten to say "end quote." I noticed that when I was responding to *Hansard's* request. In my question what I'd meant to say was, "quote, sick and tired, end quote," then subsequently say, "quote, whining, end quote." To the extent that I was not clear on that, I apologize to the House and to the minister. I will say, however, that as far as I'm concerned, for the minister of health all Albertans are constituents with respect to that. To the extent that there was a misunderstanding with respect to my meaning, I'm sorry for that. I think that's the extent of what I have to say.

The Speaker: Our tradition is that when an apology is offered, it is accepted, and we move on.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Debate adjourned February 12: Mr. Hayden speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Infrastructure, as I recall, you had nearly eight minutes.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. For the constituents of Drumheller-Stettler I believe many wonderful things have happened in this province. I think we are at a point again where it is time to celebrate. The Speech from the Throne gives direction that's proven to work and has put us in the enviable position of being the best positioned jurisdiction in North America to enter into the situation that we face today.

Mr. Speaker, this global economic correction that's taking place will without question affect Albertans, but the preparation that this government has taken on will put us in a better position and a better situation with respect to how we come out of the global economic crisis and the opportunities that it brings forward. We're talking about a situation where there will be opportunities for Albertans. Absolutely there will be difficulties that we have to face, but with the type of quality direction that we have, I know we'll do very well.

On Thursday I spoke about the history of the province and a bit of the history in my constituency and the fact that next year my family will be celebrating 100 years on the family farm. I get a great deal of advice and a great deal of direction from my constituents. This year I will be attending 14 celebrations of centennial farm awards, and those folks have been through the tough times.

I mentioned previously that we've seen tough times, and I went back in history last week to talk a bit about it. Of course, the

toughest time would've been the meteorite hit when we lost the dinosaurs in Drumheller-Stettler. It pales in comparison to what we're dealing with today.

When I go back in the history of our constituency and our province, my family arrived at about the time that our province was formed. At that time the prairies in our area had no tree cover because of a practice that the native North Americans used in burning off the grass to bring the buffalo back. There was not habitat for the biodiversity that we have nowadays. It's greatly improved.

Our health care system. Throughout the years, with the direction that this province has taken, we've seen Albertans' life expectancies increase dramatically.

We've seen unbelievable opportunities, Mr. Speaker, for education, of which my family have been beneficiaries.

We've seen difficulties in our area. When I look back at our history and the times of the First World War and the actions that the provincial government took coming through that, I think that today we're faced with similar challenges. We have had other challenges on top of that. As you travel throughout the community and hear the history, in 1918 there were many Albertans that we lost to the flu pandemic.

I say these things, Mr. Speaker, to put into perspective what we're faced with today. We have a very rich abundance of opportunities in our province with our energy, with our agriculture, those being our two largest industries, and, of course, with the tourism possibilities. I think that going forward, I would like to say that this is a defining moment. The direction that the Speech from the Throne has given us gives us an opportunity to position Albertans for better prosperity than they've ever seen before.

We will, Mr. Speaker, be judged by history, by the decisions that we make going forward. The positive and progressive approaches that we're taking are going to create opportunities for Albertans, and I suggest that we will be remembered for those. I think that we are blessed with new ideas from some of our members, new ways of looking at things. I quote our Edmonton-Meadowlark representative as an example that helps us with health and how we look at health, where he says that being 75 or 85 is not a health condition; it's a condition of health. Albertans have always been good about looking after their most vulnerable. I expect we will continue to do that. I know Albertans are concerned about that.

I ask everyone in the House to work towards the solutions that are going to be necessary for us to come out of this global economic correction in better shape than we went into it. I believe that those that are negative and disruptive in this process will be remembered only as a speed bump on the road to prosperity.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and privilege to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Calgary-McCall to respond to the Speech from the Throne. Calgary-McCall is a diverse constituency, home to many families, retired and working seniors, businesspeople, blue-collar workers, and new immigrants.

Many constituents in Calgary-McCall have language, social, and cultural issues and are the first ones to be affected by any downturn in the economy. Since the global economic downturn began, countless citizens of Calgary-McCall are under tremendous stress from the pressures of job loss. Unfortunately, these stresses can and do lead to an increase in family tensions, violence, alcohol consump-

tion, and related drug abuse. The economic crisis is having a huge impact on the daily lives of my constituents. Single mothers are worried. How are they going to put food on the table? Fathers are worried about next month's mortgage payments. The children of these families are confused and frightened by the events happening in their homes and those of their friends. For many children in my constituency these are very tough times indeed.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have seen significant portions of their retirement savings disappear overnight. Albertans living on fixed incomes are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. They must make impossible choices: buy food or prescriptions, pay the rent or buy gasoline.

The Speech from the Throne makes many promises, but it is short on details. It outlines a blurry vision for the future at a time when Albertans are demanding clarity from their leaders. It is like saying, "Don't worry; be happy; everything is going to be okay," with soft, tropical music playing in the background. Mr. Speaker, wishful thinking alone won't solve the economic problems Albertans face today. The government has failed to create and enact a long-term strategic plan to address the challenges facing Albertans of the present and the future.

Mr. Speaker, I do commend the government for recognizing the tremendous sacrifices made by the Canadian military personnel to protect not only our freedom but the freedoms of those who are worlds away. The Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009, to protect and provide job protection leave for our reservists is long overdue, and I congratulate the government for correcting this oversight.

I came to Canada from India in September 1970 and arrived in Calgary in that December. My family and I are proud to call Calgary home. Since coming to Alberta, I lived through both boom and bust. Countless Albertans lost so much during those busts. Many walked away from their homes because they could no longer afford them. I remember the new subdivision of Falconridge, which is in my constituency. It came to be known as Foreclosure Ridge while the subdivision of Abbeydale was called Abandondale.

Mr. Speaker, without a long-term plan for our future Albertans could very well face even harder times. At least the government of the day had the wisdom to set up the heritage trust fund. There was a glimmer of understanding that oil and gas would not last forever, but that understanding seems to have disappeared. The heritage fund is stagnant, and we have spent over 90 per cent of our nonrenewable resource revenues, saving only the smallest fraction of nonrenewable wealth. Indeed, the global liquidity and credit crisis has caused the fund to lose \$873 million in 2008 and 2009, a further example of this government's lack of financial oversight and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, for years the Official Opposition has strongly recommended that government save aggressively for the future. Our calls for action were ignored by this government. What a lost opportunity. Had this government saved aggressively, the interest from the heritage fund investments would have eventually replaced declining oil and gas revenues. Future generations will rightly criticize us for not planning for their needs.

During the 1981-82 session we heard that nothing was going to happen in Alberta. I remember those comforting claims very well, but we were the hardest hit. That's why this government's similar claim troubles me again. There's a feeling out there today that an economic meltdown in Alberta is unlikely. I believe this false sense of security could hurt Albertans again. Far better to be prudent, to plan for the worst, to plan for the future.

Mr. Speaker, we don't know the full extent of job losses or when the layoffs will stop. I had a constituent come to my office on

Friday, and he told me that the company he was working for had over 1,000 employees not long ago, but there are only 100 employees left working today, and their future is also uncertain.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans paid a big price when this government slashed public programs and infrastructure in order to balance the budget and pay down the debt. With the cutbacks our education suffered. We lost hospitals, doctors, and nurses. The government created a massive infrastructure deficit and a record \$1.3 billion health care deficit now. These are all consequences of this government's utter failure to plan for the long term.

The former Premier even admitted that he didn't have a plan for Alberta's growth. Albertans are living with the consequences of that failure. Albertans are waiting for hours in the emergency rooms of our hospitals. Rural Albertans are losing their local hospitals. The government does not have a financial plan or budget to complete the extension of the Peter Lougheed hospital, a facility desperately needed in Calgary's northeast. Albertans are losing their jobs, losing their homes, bankruptcies are going up, and the demands for social assistance will continue to rise.

Mr. Speaker, since oil prices are below \$40 a barrel and natural gas is hovering around \$4 a gigajoule, there's going to be a much bigger shortfall in nonrenewable resource revenues than this government budgeted for. Just last year the finance minister boasted about the potential for an 8 and a half billion dollar surplus. Who knows what kind of surplus we will see this year if any?

With businesses cutting back, with job losses occurring across the province, there may also be a shortfall in personal and corporate taxes. Will this send the government into deficit? Albertans are desperate to know, but this government seems reluctant to bring a budget forward. We need to know now what this government is thinking. Does this government intend to use the savings of the sustainability fund and the capital fund as part of their stimulus package? What happens when that money is gone and Albertans still have a huge infrastructure gap to fill?

Mr. Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne this government said that all the projects will continue as planned. If that is true, why is one very badly needed emergency room at the Peter Lougheed hospital being put on hold? Now we hear that the top two or three floors will not be completed. Why is Cochrane going to lose their X-ray clinic? Why are some P3 school building projects in question? How many more vital projects across Alberta will face a similar fate?

This government has to learn to be proactive, not reactive. They have to come up with a long-term plan to free Alberta from these boom-and-bust cycles. The need for safe streets, a strong education system, and sustainable public health care never goes away. We will always have these expenses, and the government needs to plan to pay for them.

Mr. Speaker, the so-called Alberta advantage, one that never extended to all Albertans, has been turned into a series of foggy plans by this government without the necessary detail as to how they will assist Albertans. As the shadow minister for Transportation and for Service Alberta I urge the government to ensure that the budget contains provisions to build the necessary roads and transportation infrastructures across our cities and rural Alberta. Alberta citizens and businesses need those vital public infrastructure projects to continue.

Now is the time for legislators to work harder and smarter for the citizens of Alberta in this time of economic uncertainty. My constituents support my work in this House, and I will continue to speak out on their behalf with a revitalized heart and strong commitment to all Albertans to improve their quality of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Then I will call on the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, to be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered on February 10 by His Honour the Honourable Norman Kwong, our Lieutenant Governor, and may I say what a great job he does representing our Queen here in Alberta. It was with great pride that I listened to the progressive plans of this government as it steers our province through very difficult economic times.

Mr. Speaker, I want to elaborate on our government's plans to ensure that our communities and our homes remain safe for all Albertans. All Albertans are concerned about their safety, and we have taken and continue to take action to deal with gangs and organized crime. Our plans in regard to how we're going to tackle gangs and organized crime start with a number of initiatives brought forward with the safe community recommendations.

In regard to more police, since last April we've already added more than 300 police, already fulfilling our Premier's commitment to bolster policing ranks. However, we are still planning on adding a hundred more in the next two years. I will say that these additional police officers also include four integrated gang enforcement units, operating across our province, comprised of 83 officers.

We also launched the safer communities and neighbourhoods investigative units, where we use civil legislation to shut down properties such as drug houses and gang dens. Presently we have two teams who are doing those duties, Mr. Speaker, and we hope to have more in the near future.

3:20

We're also targeting prolific offenders, those 15 per cent of criminals who are responsible for approximately 60 per cent of the crime. Again, we will be targeting 60 individuals, and they're going to be given every opportunity to contribute to society, but again if they decide to continue their ways and take from society, they will find themselves back behind bars, Mr. Speaker.

But we're not stopping there. We passed legislation last fall to allow police to seize instruments of crime. Bill 50, the victims of crime restitution act, allows our police to seize property and goods used or intended to be used in criminal acts acquired through criminal activities. That's a great new tool for our police officers, Mr. Speaker. This government is also committed to continue to target gangs and organized crime by any and all means possible.

I will bring forward Gaming and Liquor Act amendments, hopefully this session, to give police, again, more tools to deal with gang members in our licensed establishments. We have plans being made to tighten rules around vehicle modifications such as armour-plating, which is becoming prevalent among gang members, including such things as bulletproof glass, surveillance cameras. These vehicles, as I mentioned, are being used by gangs in our province. We're also looking at methods to make it illegal for gang members to wear body armour, Mr. Speaker, armour that gives them a false sense of security and also increases the danger to our public. We're also asking our federal counterparts to help us in any way they can in those regards.

Crimes and criminal activity are more sophisticated. Criminals are operating in other jurisdictions while victimizing Albertans through Internet crimes. Gang violence is occurring in broad daylight with tragic consequences. Our police are doing a great job to deal with this issue, but more needs to be done.

My department is leading the development of a new comprehensive law enforcement framework, a framework that will look at

service delivery, funding, and governance. Service delivery is critical. We need increased integration and collaboration between policing jurisdictions. We've got to make sure we have the right people doing the right job, and there is a need to operate more effectively and efficiently. Enhancing integrated law enforcement teams operating across our province can more effectively target, disrupt, and dismantle organized crime operations. We will also hear from stakeholders during consultations this month about equitable funding for police, and through this new framework we will also engage communities to address issues of governance and oversight that will also help set local policing priorities.

My ministry is also co-leading a gang suppression initiative as part of our ongoing efforts to tackle gang problems. A number of government departments as well as police are looking at strategies involving enforcement, prevention, intervention, and awareness in regard to this. We also need to take a multifaceted approach to tackle gang issues. We can't just arrest our way out of this problem, Mr. Speaker. We need to do other initiatives as well. We will also be holding a gang summit later on this summer to validate what is being proposed through the initiative and will bring forward a report to this government at the conclusion.

Mr. Speaker, there's no quick fix to these problems. However, this government is committed to working with law enforcement and communities to turn the tide on gangs. We have made safe communities a priority, and we will continue to follow the road map we have developed while looking at new and innovative ways to achieve our goal.

Part of our commitment is to continue to negotiate a new contract to retain the RCMP as our provincial police force. The RCMP have a long and proud history in Alberta, and we expect that to continue. There's probably no other police force that is as well trained as the RCMP. We also anticipate and expect the great co-operation and collaboration that exists today between our RCMP and our sheriffs. The four pilot projects with our traffic sheriffs will look at the most effective model to deliver traffic enforcement services on Alberta highways. This pilot is all about making our highways safer, reducing the carnage and the 450 deaths we see every year on our roadways.

Some other things that we're doing, Mr. Speaker. Over the next two years we will be adding 110 new probation officers to better supervise those offenders who are in our communities and also to give them the support that they need to turn their lives around. Two new sheriffs teams are apprehending people out on outstanding warrants and doing an outstanding job on that and, again, bringing some of those dangerous offenders to justice. We also have sheriffs supporting police by performing surveillance activities, and these activities free up our police to focus on more serious crimes.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to ensuring our communities remain safe. The \$470 million that we've committed to the safe communities task force recommendations is evidence of that. We are committed, we will stay the course, and we will make Alberta a better place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be questions.

There being none, then I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the discussion this afternoon on the Speech from the Throne, delivered February 10 by His Honour the Lieutenant

Governor of the province of Alberta. I certainly listened with interest and thought last week that this is a rather lengthy document, but one shouldn't conclude that because it's long, it's detailed and is providing us with a blueprint to this year's activities by the government. When you look at this document, you have to be careful because it's what's not in it that one should be concerned about.

However, there are some things, I must say, that I'm very pleased the government has accomplished. One of those is, of course, the tax cut that was initiated in January of 2009, and I'm speaking directly, Mr. Speaker, to the elimination of the Alberta health care premiums. That was a tax cut at a time when individual families were paying their share of the Alberta health care premium. It is also a time when many businesses who pick up that contribution on their payroll, whether it be monthly or twice a month, certainly appreciate that billion dollar tax cut. School boards, certainly, that use a portion of that money to pay for their employees on their paycheques, appreciate that. Hospital boards appreciate that. Many municipalities who have been kind enough to pick up that portion of the health care premium for their eligible employees appreciate that as well. That has been a long time coming, and I think it is a very good measure at this time of economic uncertainty. People need all the support they can get.

Now, on some of the bills that were discussed in the Speech from the Throne, it's going to be interesting to follow their debate through this Assembly: the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009, from the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act, the carbon capture and storage fund act. We're talking about the establishment of a \$2 billion fund committed to commercial-scale carbon capture and storage.

3:30

I had the opportunity two weeks ago of attending a luncheon where an engineer outlined how this could and will work. I have after study and, certainly, listening with keen interest to the presentation found that this is a major part of our solution in this province to increased CO₂ emissions.

Now, we are also going to deal with the Alberta public agencies governance act, and this is going to come, I believe, from the Premier's office. This proposed legislation will improve transparency and accountability and promote good governance of the province's agencies, boards, and commissions. I find this so interesting in light of the fact that this document, well before it became a proposed statute or a drafted statute, was used in the memorandum of understanding which set up our super health board, when we fired the nine regional health authorities, and changed how AADAC, changed how the Mental Health Board would operate. That document, this public agencies governance framework, was used, oddly enough, in the drafting of the memorandum of understanding that gave the minister of health such ultimate power over how public health care is delivered in this province. So it's going to be interesting to see how that is explained by the hon. members across the way.

Certainly, we're also going to see some necessary changes to other statutes. We're going to have, yet again, another look at TILMA. One piece of legislation that interests me is the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act from the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. That legislation has been discussed and talked about at length, and it's going to be interesting to see how seniors across the province feel about this proposed bill. Certainly, the previous bill, Bill 24 from the past session of this Legislative Assembly, has gotten significant interest from many seniors who

question the direction all of us have taken with that legislation. It will be interesting to see how that legislation works out.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, certainly, I look at various sections of this, and I want to get to page 9, which is the government's outline of where we're going with public health care in this province. I'm concerned. The constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar are concerned. We're not satisfied to date with the answers that have been provided by this government. Now, earlier today in question period the hon. Premier was talking about the budget and the fact that we spend I think \$36 million a day was the quote and that we have a \$13 billion budget.

Absolutely, those numbers would be correct, but I know the Minister of Energy over there would never, never contemplate making any substantial changes without doing a cost-benefit analysis. Yet this government, the minister of health under the Premier's leadership, changed how we operate health care delivery in this province without a cost-benefit analysis. We received this admission in Public Accounts last spring from the deputy minister, who has since resigned and gone on to a high-paying job with Alberta Health Services as a senior executive. The deputy minister at that time admitted that there was no cost-benefit analysis done to see how this new health ministry, this one board would work, how we would fire nine boards and create one board and that this was going to control costs and improve services at the same time.

No reasonable person that I know would restructure any organization, let alone a \$13 billion health budget, without a cost-benefit analysis, yet this government went ahead with this, and we know what the consequences are, Mr. Speaker. The consequences are that we're a further \$1.3 billion in the hole with Alberta Health's budget. I was astonished to read the papers before Christmas and see that the Premier in a year-end interview acknowledged that this was the case. One point three billion dollars, and we still see emergency room lineups. We still have hospitals that are understaffed. In fact, we have the Mazankowski centre in Edmonton that, well, is not in darkness, but certainly it's going to be September at least of this year, I'm told, before it's going to be accepting patients.

Ms Pastoor: But it's costing a fortune to keep the lights on.

Mr. MacDonald: It would cost a lot of money, hon. member, to keep that facility just sort of at a low idle.

I must say that the constituents from Edmonton-Gold Bar are not satisfied. They expressed their opinion at a town hall meeting we held before the session started. They're not satisfied with this government's directions regarding public health care. They don't have confidence in the minister of health. They certainly do not. I'm disappointed to say that, but they do not in the direction that we're going in.

They also have issues around how we're nickelling and diming seniors and that we're shifting the burden onto middle-income seniors. Now, these are individuals who worked hard all their lives, saved money, enough money, they thought, for their retirement, and they see one of the biggest financial meltdowns in their working lives, probably the biggest. It's probably bigger than 1980 through 1982, Mr. Speaker. When you look at the costs that they have on their monthly utility bills – I want to get to that in minute – and you look at their reduced investment income, now is not the time to hit them with increased pharmaceutical costs. But this is exactly what our government, unfortunately, has done, and I have to get on the record as stating that the solid majority of seniors who have contacted our constituency office in Edmonton-Gold Bar are totally dissatisfied with what the government has implemented here.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm curious. When I came here for the throne speech, I opened my desk drawer, and inside I saw a red candle, a very small candle. There are no matches in here. I would suspect that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has got some in his pocket. But I got this little candle here, and I was puzzled as to what it was for. I quietly sat here. I looked over at the government benches, and I was almost going to send the Minister of Energy a note because I'm certain that the hon. Minister of Energy is responsible for the candle because he is worried. He's not sleeping at night because our electricity system is teetering on the brink.

In fact, in the month of January – the same thing occurred in December – we had two energy emergency alerts just about supertime, 5:30 I think it was, not two days in succession but certainly two days within the same calendar week, where we essentially didn't have enough electricity to meet our demand. I would just like to be on the record as saying that I sincerely appreciate the candle that the Minister of Energy left for me in my desk. I'm sure he must be worried that we're going to lose all power in the Legislative Assembly and be in the darkness. That must be the purpose of the candle, and I appreciate that. It's a sign of his significant concern about electricity deregulation.

3:40

Now, we have to ask again: why are Albertans paying so much for electricity? Electricity consumers in Alberta on average during 2008 paid over 9 cents per kilowatt for electricity. This is the wholesale price adding transmission and distribution costs. This is double the actual cost of generation for 2008. Total cost means the return on investment, fair profit, administration, depreciation, and fuel. Four or 5 cents per kilowatt may not seem very much for each household to pay, \$25 to \$30 per month for the average electricity consumer, but it is \$25 or \$30 out of a family budget for which the consumer gets absolutely nothing, and it's totally unnecessary.

We should have left our system the way it was. I remind all hon. members of this House again that the promise was made by the government that if only we would be patient and wait, we would see the benefits of deregulation. Has Wall Street seen the benefits of deregulation? No. Have the consumers of electricity in Alberta seen the benefits of deregulation? No.

We should be very concerned about this. These are some of the questions that have been provided to me regarding this issue, and I'm very pleased to get them on the record. I'm pleased that the Minister of Energy is taking such an active interest in the deregulation of our power supply. Now, why is the wholesale price of electricity being established by the generating companies in a price-fixing auction system rather than in a fair, transparent, and efficient producer-consumer market? I would like to get, through the course of discussion on our throne speech, an answer to that question, Mr. Speaker. Again, why are Alberta electricity consumers subsidizing the cost of fuel for oil sands production? [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'm very sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I cede the floor.

The Deputy Speaker: We now have five minutes for comments and questions. Anybody? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the speech was quite interesting to listen to. I have only one question, and that's with respect to the candle that you were referring to in your speech. I don't know if you recall that you would have received that candle in November from fellow members of the Legislature in celebration of the Festival of Lights. I wonder if you recall that.

Mr. MacDonald: No, I do not. As a matter of fact, my desk was completely cleaned out between November and now. I don't know why, but it was completely cleaned out, and this is something that was put back in there. I only assumed that it was from the Minister of Energy because of his concern over power deregulation and potential blackouts.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the fact that I've just received some notification from EPCOR that once again they're increasing the administration side of their bill and that, in fact, I will now be paying probably \$40 a month for electricity that I don't even use because I've turned it off in my country home, I wonder if we could get my hon. colleague to make a comment on the oil and gas that he was speaking about and just how we address this business of actually paying more for administration costs for a commodity that we're not even using or receiving.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that question. Why are Alberta electricity consumers paying higher costs, costs that just seem to go up and up and up, and there seems to be more costly add-ons to the bill while there are windfall profits to EPCOR, Enmax, and other generators? I think we need to have a look at how we provide electricity and the middlemen or the middle persons or the ones with their hand out with all these costly add-ons that have nothing to do with electricity. In fact, on some of the power bills that constituents take into our office, the administrative costs are more than the actual charges for electricity. This has got to stop.

We have a low-cost power plan that is on our website that I'm going to once again ask the government members to have a look at and consider adopting as policy. We do know that the stabilization fund that, thank goodness, we have – and there's close to \$7 billion in it – is another fine idea from this side of the House. We have no objections if our low-cost power plan was to be adopted by the government because it would be yet another example of the members on this side of the House coming forward with positive contributions to public policy in this province.

Now, I have no idea where we would be if the government finally had recognized that it was spending far too much and saving very little when they adopted the stabilization, or stability, fund. Whatever you want to call it, it's the same thing. Now we have this money set aside. I hope it will be enough, Mr. Speaker, but it may not be.

When you look at some of the financial reports that have been issued recently, in fact, one from a financial company in Calgary, ARC Financial, indicates – and this is from the third week in January – that in Alberta the government is likely to realize \$5 billion less in royalties in 2009 as compared to 2008. Combine that with our corporate income tax, which is certainly going to be reduced from the targets that were estimated in the budget for this fiscal year. If we look at what was estimated for personal income tax, that's going to be significantly less. If we look at land sales and what's going to be gained from the sale of oil and gas leases, we're going to be down a lot of money.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today as the representative of the constituents of Calgary-Mackay to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong. The Speech from the Throne for the Second Session of the 27th Legislature was set within a rapidly changed context, both locally and internationally. The speech focused around the government's intention to protect Albertans and the things that mean the most to them. These include conditions and economic opportunities through maintaining and enhancing our competitiveness at national as well as international levels.

Albertans are not only blessed with an enviable level of resources; we are also blessed with the comfort of knowing that we'll face our share of the challenges anchored with firm foundations set by well-defined policy and program frameworks such as the provincial energy strategy, the royalty framework, the aboriginal consultation policy and guidelines, the plan for Alberta's oil sands, the forestry industry sustainability report, and the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. The prudent measures exercised by this government in the past will now enable us to continue our infrastructure program, which would encourage economic activity as well as address the needs of a growing and changing province, again with a well-defined, long-range plan with designated funds. These directional and strategic blueprints combined with responsive pro-implementation programs will help position the people and industries of Alberta well when the economy recovers.

Mr. Speaker, constituents of Calgary-Mackay have told me that the environment is an area that warrants greater attention and protection. I'm very pleased our government clearly recognizes this and responds to our citizens' expressions by putting in new environmental management approaches, renewing Alberta's water for life strategy, establishing the carbon capture and storage implementation act, introducing a plan for parks, and implementing the land-use framework.

Mr. Speaker, as I had stated in my maiden speech last year, Calgary-Mackay is a young constituency, with most of its community still between 10 to 18 years old. It has a population almost 30 per cent made up of children and youth under 19 years of age, 30 per cent immigrants, and pockets of households living in poverty. Constituents of Calgary-Mackay have to travel above the average distance for health services. There aren't community-based social services within the riding currently. The government's commitment to supporting health and educational programs and services is immensely important to the citizens of Calgary-Mackay.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, I had organized a visioning and consultation session with invited Mackay stakeholders and constituents on February 6 this year. It comes as no surprise that health care and education were issues the participants felt strongly about. Participants identified that while responses from fire, police, and emergency are excellent, they also felt that access to health services and the allocation of health care resources are issues that call for greater attention and discussion. Supports for quality education and the need for more schools was another hot topic. While participants recognize and appreciate that the schools in the riding are new, strong facilities with future potential, the growth and need for space is fast outgrowing supply. Keeping our citizenry informed as the government continues with health reform and engaging the citizens to partake in formulating the future vision for our educational system through the Inspiring Education conversation will be strong focus areas for the Mackay constituency office in the coming year.

Participants in the Calgary visioning and consultation session included representatives from police services, public libraries, school

systems, city transportation, housing developments, service organizations like Block Watch, family resource services, the food bank, seniors, and immigrant-serving agencies.

In terms of desire to change, changes, and people's hopes for the future of their communities, the group discussed the importance of infrastructure to quality of life in our communities. While there is a variety of infrastructure in our communities, the most prominently discussed was the need to improve social infrastructure and improve community cohesion. Some of the specific recommendations included increasing housing affordability, increasing capacity for community services, ensuring easy access to community services, more child care facilities, taking preventative measures for social isolation, greater focus on social and economic issues for the working poor, and developing true wraparound services where the community is involved in the process.

A great deal of time was spent on the issue of community standards. Participants felt that there has been an eroding of shared community values and standards in previous years or decades. The group felt that the quality of life in our community has been negatively affected by these trends. Some of the important issues discussed included diminished connections among citizens and communities and that these issues of community standards are multigenerational and multifaceted matters. As a community and a society we need to re-establish how to live and work together, especially in light of the increasing diversity of our communities, which is evidenced in Calgary-Mackay.

Our government's continued commitment to fostering strong communities through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, support for child care, employment, and housing programs, and the declared dedication to looking after the most vulnerable members will enable a wide spectrum of Albertans to face the future with a greater sense of security. Our government's pledge to build on the recommendations of the safe communities task force is another aspect of building strong communities. Premier Stelmach's leadership and commitment to cross-ministry collaborations and the Ministry of Justice's dedication to creating safer and more vibrant communities through comprehensive approaches that range from prevention to intervention and through legislative changes to address root causes are much welcomed by the constituents of Calgary-Mackay.

A key theme that emerged from the Calgary-Mackay community session was connections, strengthening connections at the family as well as community level, Mr. Speaker. Participants recognized the importance of taking a holistic approach to solving the issues of our communities. Many of the issues that were deemed important were connected to one another. It was the view that ultimately the improvement of our communities requires a collective effort and that new ways of establishing connections amongst elected officials, citizens, institutions, and organizations is the most effective way to do this. This belief and desire for building connections and strengthening our collective efforts, when supported and transformed into actions, would be a firm basis for the creation of strong social capital amongst our citizens, hence stronger, more vibrant, and healthier communities.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the throne speech communicated the government's focus and commitment to ensuring that core programs and services will be there for Albertans, that our vulnerable citizens will be cared for, that our government has been strengthening our legislative groundwork to provide direction for principled developments and to help ensure that our economic fundamentals remain strong so that all Albertans can face the future with confidence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. Any hon. member?

Seeing none, I would recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Decore it is truly an honour and a privilege to rise today to join other hon. members to provide a response to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on February 10, 2009. The Speech from the Throne is regarded as a foundational document in that it sets the direction for the actions of our government in the coming year. While this is the main function, I believe that it serves other purposes as well. I believe that it prompts all of us as Members of the Legislative Assembly to reflect on the big picture. It compels us to look back at where we have been and also to look forward to where we want to be. It is a two-way road, and in light of some of the changes in the world economy I believe that it is more important than ever to look both ways.

Mr. Speaker, generations of men and women, young and old when they arrived on the lands of our great province, remind us that their stories and destinies were not prewritten. Those who live in this province know that Alberta has endured tough times in the past and has consistently found ways to rise to the challenge and to build the foundation of a province that continues to be the envy of many. The Speech from the Throne gave more than the sense of this, too, shall pass and emphasized that Albertans will again rise to the challenge.

There are reasons for a thoughtful optimism in regard to our province and its prospects based largely on leadership. Our province's leadership in the past has provided us many of the unprecedented opportunities that we have in the present. Previous provincial governments had a vision for Alberta, one that would eventually include eliminating the debt and saving for the future. As we heard in the throne speech, Alberta has \$7 billion in the sustainability fund and another \$6 billion in the capital account.

Mr. Speaker, just as the actions of the leaders in Alberta's past have made a difference in our present, our actions today will shape our future. As a recent publication articulated, we must be thoughtful in our attempt to determine the changing landscapes of the next Alberta. Indeed, now is a time of enormous opportunity. To paraphrase British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, the secret of success is to be ready for an opportunity when it comes. Increasingly, success in the modern world economy is based on factors related to our people, their level of education, their work ethic, but above all their creativity, ingenuity, imagination, and the ability to be innovative. The areas that do best in developing, nurturing, and harnessing what writer Richard Florida called the creative class will be the areas that have the best chance to capitalize on and optimize the opportunities presented by this changing new context.

Mr. Speaker, how do we create the new conditions in our modern economy that will allow the growth of these much-needed innovation-based approaches, creativity, and entrepreneurship in the energy industry, the health care sector, the arts, science and technology, and in all areas of the economy and our communities? Much of the answer lies in a determined, comprehensive, and unrelenting commitment to supporting lifelong learning in all of its forms to enrich the lives of all Albertans. Our children, youth, and adults all have their own gifts, talents, and enormous potential. As a government we must continue to play a role to create, promote, and support their lifelong learning.

This past fall we launched Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans, which in 2009 will engage Albertans in a dialogue about how education in our province can help tomorrow's children and youth find their passions and prepare for success. This is just one

way that the Alberta government will be crossing boundaries to ensure that we are thorough in collecting a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives to help us create a new vision for K to 12 education and a policy framework that will guide the ministry and inform legislation.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, the government is also supporting Alberta students with their endeavours through our postsecondary education system. The continued development of Campus Alberta provides opportunities for any Albertan to find the right fit and pursue higher education. Campus Alberta allows for learning opportunities to be flexible in design, allowing alternatives to classroom learning such as online learning and workplace learning, helping to improve geographical barriers. This facilitates the pursuit of a career at any age or location by a method that is best suited to the individual. Campus Alberta is inclusive of all of the province's unique postsecondary schools. This kind of development increases the number of options that Alberta students have and reflects the government's ability to adapt to the new realities of educational flexibility.

In August of 2008 \$73 million in funding was provided to create student spaces in universities, colleges, and technical institutes across the province. This will allow for more students to attend Alberta's postsecondary schools in the coming years. Mr. Speaker, these initiatives demonstrate the government's commitment to learning opportunities and to a strong investment in Alberta's intellectual and social capital. As Albertans continue to utilize these opportunities, the growth of our educated and skilled workforce will help our communities be creative and innovative as we compete in the world economy.

Mr. Speaker, if success is based on the confluence of social and human capital, our devotion to harness its development must be paramount. In order to do so, we must take the broadest possible approach to fostering value-driven learning in all of its forms. In this regard we should follow the lead of the Canadian Council on Learning, which has been instrumental in promoting a broadly based view that includes UNESCO's four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. It's developing the full potential of every citizen in each of these four areas that will allow us to succeed in these challenging times. I've said before that the greatest wealth this province has is generated by the diverse and talented contributions of all the people. Each day, year-round Albertans make a piece of history by inspiring today, seizing tomorrow, and building a brighter future for all to enjoy.

Above all, Mr. Speaker, the government must work in systematic and smart ways to shape our future by mobilizing the collective knowledge base of the people in our province and provide the inspiration and tools to meet and strive beyond the expectations of the shifting world realities. This means making investments to better support and stimulate creativity, ingenuity, and the ability to be innovative in approaches. These are some of the new skills and talents that are necessary to rebuild momentum and to sustain our competitive advantage – growth, quality of life, prosperity – and, more importantly, are needed to revitalize our communities and society.

These activities also mean building on a foundation that recognizes that our province's growing diversity is not a problem to be overcome but, rather, is the source of our greatest strength. It is precisely this diversity of culture, experience, ideas, and insights that will provide the basis for the new thinking, the innovative ideas, and the imaginative entrepreneurialism that is so badly needed in a hypercompetitive and uncertain world. Nowhere is this diversity of

untapped talent more evident than our growing numbers of new Canadians. Let's remember that they are the ones who took a chance and left their old situations behind; Mr. Speaker, that is the bravest kind of entrepreneurialism.

Our important task is to create the kind of conditions where their courage and talents can meaningfully contribute to supporting their families, communities, and our province. Our job as legislators is to recognize this untapped potential in our people, support it, nurture it in smart ways, and then let the gifts and talents of our diverse people and communities do the rest.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne rightly talked about leadership, leadership to make a difference in times that are indeed troubling and challenging but also stimulating and exciting in terms of huge opportunities that await those people in places that can provide the right solutions here. If we take the long view and continue to make wise investments, support our people and organizations in their efforts, and focus on developing the enormous potential that is in our families and communities, Alberta will be one of the few places in the world that will continue to be in the vanguard, resilient and leading the way.

Despite these uncertain times we are in the midst of a fundamental, long-term transformation, and our province's future is not prewritten. It is ours to chart and to define. Albertans have always looked forward, not back, and surprised the world with a far different motivation. Albertans are a people with unparalleled vision and wisdom coupled with determination and confidence in their abilities to shape a preferred future for our province. I'm looking forward to being actively involved in the changing landscapes of the next Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There is five minutes for comments and questions if any other member would like to take that.

Seeing none, now I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on February 10, 2009. When listening to the throne speech, I was inspired by the way in which it envisions Alberta's future. Indeed, the speech reflected optimism, determination, and in true Alberta form the value of standing together to protect our future.

These are uncertain economic times, to be sure, but it is important now more than ever that as a government we maintain our prudence, our pragmatism, and our commitment to sound and responsible fiscal management and also that we remain optimistic about the times ahead. There are many reasons to be optimistic. Our unemployment rate in Alberta currently sits at 4.4 per cent, much lower than the national average of 7 per cent and very near the 5 per cent benchmark that indicates a balanced labour market.

In addition to this, Mr. Speaker, the job market in our province is regarded as still among the best in North America, all of which continues to provide Albertans with opportunities to be the champions of their own success. I can speak about this opportunity first-hand. I first arrived here in this great province in 1982 with no more than \$100 in my pocket, and after years of hard work and determination I now have the privilege of being a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods.

These opportunities are an attractive prospect in my native land, the Philippines. In fact, on average, 75 per cent of Filipino foreign workers decide to come to Alberta. In 2007 alone this meant that 6,000 Filipinos decided to call Alberta their new home.

In my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods immigration is one of the most emerging, important issues. Mr. Speaker, immigrants continue to play a significant role in Alberta, and our province's ability to continue to expand our growth lies not only in maintaining our current international relationships but also in cultivating new ones. Indeed, it is one of the best investments that we can make.

In fact, in the Speech from the Throne the Lieutenant Governor alluded to this government's commitment to investing and securing Alberta's future growth. As we consider what this growth will mean for our province, there will surely be a need for skilled and hard-working Albertans. In this way there's a unique role for foreign-trained workers to be part of the solution. Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that Alberta may need as many as 95,000 international workers in the next 10 years to meet our growing labour demands. We continue to welcome immigrants to Alberta to pursue their dreams, help build our communities, and share in the advantages that this province has to offer.

4:10

I was glad to hear that the Alberta government will continue its commitment to building and developing Alberta's workforce and supporting innovation in all areas of the province's labour market, all of which helps us continue to adapt to the changing business environment and grow with it. This includes capitalizing on the success of the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy, a key initiative that was highlighted in last week's throne speech. In many ways this 10-year provincial strategy sets the future direction for investment in Alberta's workforce. It is based on extensive consultation with business and industry, professional and labour organizations, education and training providers, and also aboriginal people. Most importantly, it recognizes that Alberta's people are the driving force in sustaining the province's continued economic growth and quality of life. This makes investment in people one of the most important priorities for this government.

Ultimately, continued success for Alberta in the global economy requires an ongoing commitment to developing the knowledge and skills of our workforce, ensuring that all Albertans have access to learning and training opportunities. Indeed, the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy is one of the supporting pillars of Alberta's 20-year strategic plan, which has as one of its goals to support the development of immigrant Albertans and the attraction and retention of immigrants in Alberta.

This includes helping new immigrants with some of the challenges they may face when finding jobs that fully utilize their existing skills and experience. In this way this government recognizes that Alberta's immigrants may have unique education and training requirements that need to be addressed in order to help them achieve their full potential within both the labour market and society at large. All Albertans, including immigrants already here in Alberta, should have the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills, and talents, and the Alberta government remains committed to these tasks.

To this end, the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy has identified a number of priority actions in this area. This includes developing partnerships with other government ministries and stakeholders to recognize the credentials, competencies, and prior learning and work experience of immigrants as well as continuing to promote Alberta as a destination of choice for international immigrants and showcasing the opportunities that can only be found here.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, since the strategy's implementation a number of actions have been taken by this government, and they have made great strides in this very good area. This includes a Canada-Alberta working group that was established that not only reviewed many of

the current processes in place but also took an active role by delivering regional seminars around hiring foreign workers. It also helped establish an Alberta temporary foreign workforce hotline to respond to inquiries by employers and foreign nationals. In addition, the off-campus work permit program for international students was also created in 2006, making it easier for non-Canadian students to apply for work permits which now allow them to work off campus while they complete their studies.

Perhaps one of the most significant actions in this recent implementation was the recent trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA, signed with British Columbia, which will allow for, among other things, a greater movement of our skilled workers across the provincial boundaries. Taken together, these and other steps will continue to help and support new immigrants as they move into the workforce and settle in Alberta's communities.

Mr. Speaker, as the throne speech revealed, communities remain at the forefront of the government's plan for the future. Maintaining safe, strong, and sustainable communities has played a key role in Alberta's development over time, and they remain vital to the province's future. Programs like the municipal sustainability initiative were in fact created to help municipalities address growth-related challenges and support long-term sustainability. In 2007 alone municipalities received a total of \$400 million to support them in their efforts to ensure the level of service delivery Albertans have come to expect.

The things that I have identified are only part of the comprehensive and exciting plans for Alberta's future. They will continue to impact and enhance the lives of Albertans in real and positive ways. Whether we are Albertans by birth or we have come to this great province from another part of the world, we face this future together with optimism and hope. To me the Speech from the Throne confirms that the Alberta advantage remains alive and well, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, I would like to recognize the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hope, encouragement, and the future: these are the messages outlined in this year's Speech from the Throne. The speech included plans to help Albertans meet the challenges of tough times and lay a foundation for future growth. The government of Alberta recognizes that times of economic uncertainty put pressure on Albertans. We understand these challenges and are committed to working with Albertans to provide the necessary leadership to support them through such times.

In times like these Albertans turn to their neighbours and communities for support, so it goes without saying that our communities must be strong now more than ever. The Premier has stated his firm belief that strong municipalities are the key ingredient to strong communities. This shapes my ministry in everything we do. Alberta is blessed to be made up of vibrant, inclusive communities. They are truly places to be envied. They are places of opportunity, culture, and belonging, places where citizens are supported and cared for and feel safe. Above all, they are places that Albertans can be proud to call home.

To foster these strong communities throughout the province, the government of Alberta remains committed to supporting municipalities through the municipal sustainability initiative. This initiative delivers on the Premier's commitment to build strong communities.

The funding is having a real impact to help our communities plan for the future. Throughout our great province Albertans are enjoying the benefits of the municipal sustainability initiative. They are seeing new roads, recreation facilities, fire halls, and libraries. I need to emphasize the critical role that libraries play in the well-being of our communities. Especially in tough times, they are connectors to new jobs and help new generations of Albertans become literate.

4:20

In addition to promoting strong communities, my ministry is committed to ensuring that Albertans are safe and secure. New building and fire codes are being finalized that reach a balance between safety, affordability, and technically sound practices. These will buy time, when there is a fire, for people to get out of their homes and for firefighters to respond. We also know that training first responders is a critical component to our emergency response system. We need and we will support these volunteers, who play such an important role in keeping our communities safe.

Albertans will always need strong communities and will continue to look to them for support. My top priority is to ensure that we have sustainable municipalities in which strong communities can thrive. This is a priority for our Premier, for my ministry, and for the government of Alberta today and into the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak about the throne speech as well. Our government under the leadership of our Premier has committed to forging ahead in the best interest of Albertans. We will look forward to taking on the challenges that we face and that the world faces now with the economic downturn, but under the leadership of our Premier we've made plans to deal with some of these.

We've got a \$7 billion sustainability fund and \$6 billion in capital. While many in this Legislature would dismiss that as some sort of luck, there is no other jurisdiction in North America that has that type of benefit, and there's no other jurisdiction that had foreseen that there could be problems and had planned for them. Anybody who tells you they did otherwise is just looking in hindsight.

We have a couple of things that we have to do, that we focused on in our department, to help with the initiatives that are outlined by the throne speech. Alberta Arts Days, expanding that – and I'll talk to that in a minute – but most importantly, I think, from our perspective is that we look at what our department represents. Culture and Community Spirit is the quality of life that all Albertans enjoy. It's the fabric of who we are and what we are, where we've been and where we're going. We show that through our interpretive centres and museums and historic sites.

We look at that through how we support our not-for-profit and voluntary sector through the ANVSI, or the Alberta nonprofit, voluntary sector initiative, where we're going to work with other ministries to ensure that we put our resources and our abilities together to work on behalf of Albertans and the 19,000 not-for-profit-sector organizations in this province that assist those in need, less fortunate, and in need of special care. We recognize the fact that most of those organizations do so with the ability to do that in a more cost-effective manner than government could ever do.

We also have responsibility in the strong and safe communities, and I fervently believe that any safe community has to be a strong community first. I've had the pleasure of visiting over 65 communi-

ties across the province – hamlets, villages, towns, small cities, and large cities – and I can tell you that the spirit of Albertans is alive and well. That's what will carry us through this. It's not just the money that we have set aside. It's the indomitable fighting spirit of Albertans, who always give more per capita than anyone else, who take care of the less fortunate with their time and money more than any other jurisdiction in Canada.

We have several programs that will help with that. We have our major community facilities program, which has provided over \$280 million over the last two years. That helps with the enhancement and construction of community facilities from rec centres to rinks, hospices, Ronald McDonald House, humane society, skateboard parks for youth, drug and alcohol addiction centres, and the like. You can see, Mr. Speaker, that those are the fundamental units that we have in our communities. It's not just Edmonton and Calgary; it's rural Alberta.

I've learned a great lesson from there: it's about collaboration. Our programs are grant programs with matching dollars. That means that the government gives a hand up, not a handout. We contributed through the major community facilities program \$280 million, but that means that Albertans have put up at least that much. In fact, we've got requests now for \$484 million and programs of \$196 billion in infrastructure. That is a stimulus, not something that was designed out of fright, not something designed out of reaction. That's something that this government through my predecessor, now the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration, had initiated under the direction of the Premier.

We will continue to fund programs. We will work with the Minister of Justice and my seven other colleagues to collaborate on programs and utilization of dollars. Many times we hear that there's 480 some-odd million dollars that we've put towards safe communities. In fact, if you look at the collaboration between Health, Children's Services, Housing and Urban Affairs, Seniors and Community Supports, and Municipal Affairs, there is probably well over a billion dollars that we spend on safe communities. It takes the efforts of all of us to be able to do that. Our Premier has a vision to encourage that, and he has the support of the cabinet and our caucus to make that happen.

Lastly, I'll touch on Alberta Arts Days. Even though that was the one item that was mentioned in our budget, our government is no less committed to arts than it was before. It was our Premier's vision to create the first department or ministry of culture in over 20 years and put money towards that: \$36 million towards the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and money also for the implementation of the Premier's Council on Arts and Culture. And we've just begun. We're taking an inventory of what we have across the province and looking at where we're deficient. We're integrating programs such as MCFP and the community facilities enhancement program and CIP along with AFA money. In fact, we've spent probably well over \$46 million on arts and culture through either capital or programming, and I would probably put us per capita on a third ranking in the country.

Arts Days. Arts Day last year on September 6 was enjoyed by 30 different communities across the province from Westlock to Fort McMurray, Whitecourt, I think Lac La Biche, Wetaskiwin, Camrose, High River, Calgary, Edmonton, St. Albert, a great cross-section of big and small. What it wasn't was just a celebration of what we told the communities Albertans were all about with respect to arts. It was an example of totality, what those communities believed it to be. They got involved, just as rural Alberta always does or small communities do, and they decided themselves that they wanted to show pride in the area in which they live. They showed that Alberta has an interest in arts that's pervasive across the country. It didn't

require dollars from the province. It was just to showcase their pride in their own artists, whether visual arts or literary arts or performing arts. Art is something that's different for everybody, and that's what it showed.

What we're going to do this year is enhance that by moving from one day to three days. In the three days with the help of the Minister of Education we're going to try to engage every K to 12 student across this province. We are going to have each one of them on that Friday, September 18, either write a poem, read a book, write a story, draw a picture, do a piece of sculpture, engage in a play, a musical performance, or a physical recreational sporting activity because we envision that arts and culture is inclusive of sports and recreation. We don't want to minimize ourselves or exclude anybody, so we're going to do that.

The other two days will be opportunities, again, for the communities to show what Alberta has to showcase in terms of arts and culture. I'm quite confident that we will have several hundred communities and a thousand different activities. If the responses from the different municipalities are any indication, it should be great. Now the Canada Council for the Arts and different arts organizations in different provinces around the country want to come to Alberta – yes, Mr. Speaker, Alberta – to ask us how we did it. Again Alberta will take the lead. I tell you that before this Premier it's been a long time since anybody used "leader" and "Alberta" and "arts" in the same sentence.

Thank you.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Five minutes allowed for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if I could ask the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit to comment on exactly how sports and recreation fits in under arts and culture and what the difference is in terms of the dollars. You did mention it, and I thought perhaps it should be out of a different department.

Mr. Blackett: Well, in Spirit of Alberta, our cultural policy, we defined the goals as including arts, culture, recreation, and sport. When we talked about the four things, creating access for all Albertans irrespective of geography or irrespective of their socioeconomic status, we talked about building capacity in the community. In rural Alberta especially you can't differentiate because that hockey rink may be where you have to use one of the rooms for a rehearsal. The community halls have multipurpose facilities, so you can't just say that it's a sports facility and not a cultural facility, not a community facility; they're all integrated as one.

In terms of the actual dollars, when I mentioned \$50 million, that's a portion out of CFEP and MCFP. Sporting organizations take another envelope out of that, and there's obviously funding through Tourism, Parks and Recreation. It's just that we thought that when the cultural policy was created, it was to be inclusive of all of those because there is much overlap. We thought that there's more benefit in trying to be inclusive than in trying to separate the two.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. I certainly appreciate that answer, but it's not so much facilities I was thinking of in terms of where the dollars actually are separated because there is nothing that can beat 40 hockey moms as opposed to five moms who may want their daughters to learn pottery. I just find that sometimes the dollars

between the sports and the actual arts aren't levelled out, I guess, in the way that I think that they should be. The squeaky wheel gets the oil.

Mr. Blackett: Well, I'll tell you one thing: I'm a hockey dad, I'm a soccer dad, and I love the arts. I love theatre. I love all of those things, and I don't see any difference in one or the other. Applications come to our department under CFEP or CIP or MCFP; our CLOs don't discriminate for those. Now, there are sporting dollars, and there are AFA dollars, but in terms of the other portion of it I think there are enough dollars to go around. Everybody would love more money, but I don't think there's anybody in the arts community that would say that we're not stepping up and taking care of those interests. If they want to have pottery, there's an opportunity to have pottery. In any one of those instances where they don't, I'd love to hear about it and see what we can do about that.

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

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks. Now the minister's got me a little puzzled because he's been quite clear that he believes that sports and recreation is part of his understanding as the minister of culture and arts – sorry, let me be correct: arts. If he's including sports and recreation under his department, then what is the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation funding exactly?

Mr. Blackett: I'm not talking about organized sports. I'm talking about recreational activities, whether it's in a playground or in a community environment. If that's puzzling to you, well, if you looked at the cultural policy – and it's been tabled in this House – it clearly states that recreation and sport is inclusive of that. My main priority, obviously, is arts and culture. I'm not trying to replace the minister responsible for sport by any sense of the imagination. I'm just saying that when there are communities and there are dollars and we look at facilities and helping with those and programs with those, there's a lot of overlap.

When we created our Premier's Advisory Council on Arts and Culture, you will notice that Diane Jones Konihowski, a well-known pentathlete, a former Olympic champion, a big advocate for sport, and John Short, who is another big advocate for sport, are included in that. That's not by accident; that was by design, and I don't see that there is any contradiction there. We're not talking about any organized programs. We're talking about recreation that happens naturally.

Ms Blakeman: But the minister is talking about using funding from a department that's called culture to fund recreational groups but evidently not organized recreational groups. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] I'll have to let this go for the time being.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listening to the members opposite, you quickly realize that every silver lining has a cloud, doesn't it? Which takes me to my comments on the Speech from the Throne. Olivier Blanchard writes in the most recent issue of the *Economist*: "Crises feed uncertainty. And uncertainty affects behaviour, which feeds the crisis." That's what I'm hearing a lot of. Sometimes when I'm listening to some of the comments and responses to the Speech from the Throne from the aisle opposite, I'm wondering if they have heard the very same speech that I have heard.

Indeed, there are certain and sudden shifts in the economic markets throughout the world, not only in Alberta, contrary to what some would have us believe, but when you look at Alberta in the context of the world, when you look at Alberta in the context of Canada, North America, the European Union, you soon realize that, as we always have known, Alberta is in a very privileged position indeed. Things may not be as economically sound or blessed as they have been perhaps a year from now, but again, putting it in relative terms, Alberta is doing quite well.

Let's just take a look at the Speech from the Throne. Mr. Speaker, I would challenge you today to look at any budget of any G-8 country, which includes Canada, frankly at any budget of any European country or Asian developed country and see the spending on a per capita basis that Alberta is doing on infrastructure. To bring it down to a more human level, as a member representing the riding of Edmonton-Castle Downs, I don't recall as many dollars being spent in my riding on infrastructure as I'm seeing right now, at this very moment.

As a matter of fact, it's almost to the point where it's inconvenient for residents of Castle Downs because we have roads dug up. We are having a highway put in. We're having various provincial and municipal structures being built at the same time, which is unprecedented. Now, these structures not only will serve Albertans for many years to come, but what they also do is provide valuable jobs. They provide jobs to Edmontonians, to Albertans of various sorts, skilled and unskilled work that is going to keep Albertans employed for many years to come as these are not short-term but long-term projects.

Mr. Speaker, not only are these large structures being put in, but I can tell you right now that just in my riding of Edmonton-Castle Downs three separate playgrounds are being built. One might say: Well, what's the big deal, a playground? But it is a big deal because that's what makes our community stronger; that's what keeps our kids fit. And playgrounds no longer are little frivolous pieces of infrastructure because they all cost somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$1 million each, and a large portion of this funding, direct and indirect because some is via the municipality, is provided by this government. Again, many governments have already cut out any such spending, which would be considered frivolous by others, yet in Alberta we're enjoying this.

4:40

Now, looking at jobs, as a consequence of this investment in Alberta but also as a result of some wise decisions made by Alberta businesses, our unemployment rate, Mr. Speaker, is relatively very low. I don't think there is another province or state in the United States or country in Europe that can boast having such a low unemployment rate as Alberta does. What that means is that in conjunction with the Alberta government Alberta businesses have made some wise decisions and are able to weather the economic storm that the rest of the world is facing at this time.

As a matter of fact, I have had the honour and the privilege of travelling the province over the last few weeks and meeting with many, many foreign workers, skilled and unskilled workers. I know that there are employers still looking for employees in certain parts of the province. They simply can't find either Albertans or Canadians to fill those positions, and they are still seeking workers from outside of Canada. What's really encouraging, Mr. Speaker, is that when you sit down and you speak with these foreign workers, you quickly find out that even though they are here on a very limited visa only to work, by a preponderance a majority of them want to stay here in Canada.

Now, that's a good report card because this is from individuals who have skills, skills that we value, who come from another part of

the world, so they can compare Alberta to another jurisdiction, and they would rather move their entire family and their lives here to Alberta because comparably they find Alberta a good place to be at and would like to build their futures here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, that's something that I'm not hearing from the other side of the aisle, and I think we should be talking more about that because we should be positive at this time.

Also, when I travelled throughout the province meeting with not only foreign workers but community members that welcomed them, what I have learned is that by and large Alberta is a very welcoming community. Foreigners still are attracted to this province. They know about this province, and it is a province of choice not only to foreigners but to other Canadians, Mr. Speaker. We still have a positive growth of other Canadians coming to Alberta as opposed to leaving Alberta. Now, that's something that we should be looking at because that is the measuring stick by which we should be measured.

Mr. Speaker, if you were to take the time and speak to mayors and Reeves and other elected officials in municipalities, I take comfort in knowing from them that even though of course they have needs, and if you ask them, "Do you get enough money?" the answer will always be no, that means they're doing their job. Their job is to advocate for their respective jurisdictions as much as they can. But if you look at our provincial spending for municipalities, again, on a per capita basis I don't think that there is any other jurisdiction in Alberta or perhaps even the United States that spends more money on municipalities and the services that municipalities can in turn provide to their residents. This is something that we can boast about at this point, and no other jurisdiction really can. [interjections] I know, Mr. Speaker, that my being positive is having some adverse effect on the Member for Edmonton-Centre, but please bear with me and try to stomach a little bit more positive news. You will have a chance to ask me negative questions later.

You know, listening to the other side of the aisle, I always try to keep track in my calendar: is it a spending day or saving day? Walking into the Chamber, one never knows because up until recently there were very many spending days: more money for this, more money for that. You know very well, Mr. Speaker, that no matter how much money the government would allocate to an expenditure, it would never be enough. But then there was a shift, and we were being advised and the President of the Treasury Board and our minister of finance were being advised: "Enough spending. Save money. We're getting into a critical area." But in question period – Mr. Speaker, you can mark your calendar – today was a spending day. Today we can spend more money.

But you can't run a government like this, and the Speech from the Throne was very clear on that, that the government of Alberta will strike a balance between saving and spending. We will make sure that we don't spend borrowed money. We recently had a federal budget, Mr. Speaker, and I must tell you with some degree of dismay that many of the packages put in place right now to stabilize the Canadian economy are packages made out of borrowed money. Either you and I will pay those dollars back in the future or our kids will, but they are made out of borrowed money.

When you look at the Speech from the Throne and, I imagine, the subsequent budget, we will not be spending borrowed money. We will be spending money that we have set aside exactly for the situation that we are dealing with right now. Again, if we were to listen to advice from the aisle opposite, we would right now be spending borrowed money. I think we can be positive on that front, Mr. Speaker, as well. [interjections] The chirping goes on, Mr. Speaker, but you will give, I imagine, the opposition their time.

Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the Speech from the Throne, also, there is some very, very good planning for the future. As you know, our Premier has shown leadership in striking the TILMA agreement with British Columbia. No longer does a welder welding a pipeline to the B.C. border have to stop and drop his tools, and a new welder picks up on the other side of the border. Now we recognize that our welders, electricians, and other professionals can practise their trades across the border. They don't all of a sudden magically lose their skills when they cross the border.

Now, as you know, our Premier is a leader on this front and is encouraging such movement of labour and goods and mobility of materials from east to west throughout Canada. This will make Canada a stronger place to do business in, a stronger place to trade with, and definitely will make Canada an attractive place to invest when we achieve a measurably larger degree of labour and goods mobility throughout the province.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been always very aggressive in attracting and forging new markets. Even though we have a partner to the south who has been a long-term, trusted partner in trade and in many other alliances, Alberta realizes that there is a world outside of North America. We have been very active in attracting investment from foreign parts of the world and marketing Alberta's products – be they agriculture, timber, and carbon fuels – throughout the world. The speech makes it very clear that we will be on the forefront of promoting Alberta throughout the world, and we shall continue doing that.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the positive highlights from the Speech from the Throne. This is how I heard the Speech from the Throne. I can tell you that I am very confident in the Premier and the leadership of our cabinet and our caucus members, that we will be able to get through this difficult economic time in much better shape than any other jurisdiction on this continent and throughout the world. I know that Albertans can focus on their lives and can rest assured that if there is a government in this land that will get them through this hard time, this will be the government under the leadership of this Premier.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move to adjourn the debate at this point.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there are guests in the Assembly. Could we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real great pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly an Alberta government employee who has served the last 27 years as a reservist with the Canadian Forces. Major Chris Chodan serves with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and recently completed a six-month tour of duty in Afghanistan. He's a proud member of our military, and I'm honoured to have him as a member of our communications branch. I would ask all members to offer our most warm welcome to Major Chris Chodan.

**Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 1
Employment Standards (Reservist Leave)
Amendment Act, 2009**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration on behalf of the hon. Premier.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009.

I'm sure all members of this Assembly agree that Canada's reserve forces are an important part of Canada's national heritage. The primary function of our reserves is to augment, sustain, and support the regular forces.

4:50

In recent years, Mr. Speaker, reservists have made substantial contributions to Canada's international efforts and domestic relief operations. I've just introduced Major Chris Chodan, who's been in the reserves for 27 years and recently returned from a tour of duty in Afghanistan. I did spend a few hours a couple of weeks ago with him, when he shared his experiences overseas. I appreciated the fact that, you know, he was willing to talk to me about his experiences. I'm very proud and very honoured to say that Chris is an employee of my department and one of 2,500 reservists in Alberta.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Across the country there are over 9,500 reservists on full-time employment within the Canadian Forces. Since the year 2000 more than 4,600 reservists, including Major Chodan, have been deployed for Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Croatia, Haiti, and other international hot spots.

At home reservists have contributed in numerous ways over the years. They have assisted during search and rescue operations and forest fires right here in Alberta. They responded to public needs following severe snowstorms in British Columbia, aided during the flood relief operations in Quebec and Manitoba, the ice storms in eastern Canada, Swissair flight 111 crash recovery operations, and a host of other situations. Thousands were standing by in the event of disruptions following the year 2000 rollover. Mr. Speaker, in addition, reservists often help at or participate in cultural events, parades, festivals, and other public events in communities across Canada.

Our proposed legislation gives us the flexibility to extend the scope of reservist leave to cover one-off events as required. For example, there's a good possibility that reservists may be required for security at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

Service in the reserve forces is voluntary and is for an indefinite period of service. Reserve forces units are located in hundreds of communities across Canada, including Major Chodan's Loyal Edmonton Regiment here in Edmonton and nine other units in Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer. Those who are in the reserves receive valuable trade and technical training, they receive leadership skills, they receive access to educational programs, and of course they feel satisfaction from serving their country.

Primary reservists usually train on evenings and weekends; however, most of them need two weeks of full-time service every year to keep their qualifications current. From time to time they also need to attend courses to prepare for operational missions. That's

why this bill is recommending 20 days of unpaid annual leave. This would be over and above the amount of vacation a reservist receives through an employer. In discussion with the Canadian Forces Liaison Council we're told this should be an adequate period of time for a reservist to receive the annual training they need to keep their skills current. In comparison, the government of Canada allows up to 15 days of leave for annual training. Manitoba and Saskatchewan provide leave for training but don't cap the number of days.

Of course, the other large component of Bill 1 is proposing an indefinite period of unpaid leave to serve either overseas or here at home for domestic emergencies. Major Chodan's leave began one year prior to his six-month tour of duty in Afghanistan. In this case that's the amount required for active military training, training that could very well mean life or death while on tour. Some provinces place a cap on the amount of time a reservist can be away on leave. New Brunswick's, for example, is 18 months, including any training that might be required. While a year and a half should be enough time for reservist leave, the Canadian Forces Liaison Council tells us there could be extenuating circumstances in any given mission. It's not likely, but it could happen, and I for one would hate to see a reservist lose his or her job here at home while serving our country abroad.

These proposed amendments strike a balance that we believe is fair for both the employer and the reservist, and we believe these amendments, if passed, stand to be among the most comprehensive in the country. Members of our military, whether they're with the regular forces or the reserves, have long been willing to make tremendous sacrifices. These sacrifices over a great number of decades provide us with the freedom of democracy, the very freedom that we exercise in this House each and every day. These proposed amendments are a small way of extending our gratitude along with the gratitude of all Albertans and are, quite simply, the right thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and participate in the debate on Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009. Certainly, it is time that this province presented to this Assembly legislation of this nature. If you look at the background of reservists in this country, not only have they been part of our military history, but also we forget that sometimes many of these individuals help out in time of domestic need. Whether it be an ice storm or a forest fire or any other emergency, including plane crashes, reservists come forward.

Certainly, I think this has been recognized in this bill. As I understand it in section 53, anyone who has completed 26 consecutive weeks of employment is eligible for this proposed leave. Not only is it to possibly have a deployment with our armed forces outside Canada in military operations but also operations within Canada relating, as I said earlier, to an emergency, annual training of up to three weeks in one given year, or any activity that is going to be set out through the regulations.

Now, I too have had on occasion an opportunity to meet and discuss issues with Major Chris Chodan, and certainly that individual is a fine example of many of the citizens not only in Alberta but across the country who are members of our reserve forces. I've had an opportunity in the past to be a participant along with the major in Remembrance Day services at a couple of locations, one, to be specific, the McNally high school in Edmonton-Gold Bar. The gentleman's sense of duty and the sense of duty that is obviously coming forward from all reservists is reflected in this bill.

When we look at this bill, we can't forget and we have to be mindful that we've seen other provinces, we've seen the federal government enact similar legislation in recent years. Again, it is a pleasure to support this bill at this time in Alberta. Our reservists deserve job protection, and this bill will set out to do just that.

Now, during this economic time if one was contemplating helping out in the effort in Afghanistan, knowing that this legislation was in this province may make the decision easier for some of those individuals. The decision may be easy, but certainly the job is tough. Whether it be on an active war front, like Afghanistan is, or in a peacekeeping measure, those are very, very difficult jobs. They're tough jobs, and I admire the men and women of this country who are willing to step forward and do those jobs.

5:00

Now, with that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude by saying that this is a bill that I think we, hopefully, will pass in this Legislative Assembly. I think it is reflective of the times. I'm glad the government has come forward with it, and I look forward to further discussion from all hon. members of the Assembly. Please, this is a good bill, and I hope it has speedy passage through the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great satisfaction to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009. This is really about ensuring that the men and women who protect our country and our province have their jobs to return home to. I fully support the commitment of reservists to the integrity, security, safety of our homeland, Canada, and peacekeeping in the world. I have always felt strongly about this, and I'm grateful that its recognition has now come as Bill 1, sponsored by our Premier for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, earlier in the legislative process I submitted two motions for this 2009 session. The first is Motion 516, which urges the government to amend the Employment Standards Code to ensure that reservists who work in Alberta are reinstated to their civilian positions, earnings, and other benefits for the duration of time they serve on active duty in the Canadian armed forces. I'm very pleased that Bill 1 captured the very essence of the motion. This is a salute that we can give to all men and women who serve in the Canadian military to protect our wonderful province and our beautiful country.

Mr. Speaker, I also submitted Motion 599, which urges the government to recognize the qualifications, skills, knowledge, and personal development that a soldier receives while in the Canadian armed forces as job training, work experience, skill certification for comparable civilian employment. Now, annual training is necessary to update a reservist's knowledge and skills and is generally required in order for a reservist to be eligible for deployment. It only makes sense that if service people obtain skills or qualifications during their military duty, they be applicable to civilian occupations. Practising a trade or knowledge of operating heavy equipment, management of logistics, planning, and various engineering skills are a few examples. The cross-recognition of training and certification would allow employees to put their skills to use in the civilian workforce.

This would also allow employers to benefit from the knowledge that their reservist employee is bringing. In return this would also help compensate the employers for allowing reservists time off from civilian work to serve and train in the military. This is something that I also feel very passionate about, and I hope that there would be some consideration towards it, if not during this session, perhaps at some point in the near future.

From what I understand, in most cases an employer must reinstate a reservist to the same or an alternate position of a comparable nature without reduction in the grid of earnings or other benefits. This is the sense of security that these fine people and their families need and truly deserve.

Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago I proposed the increase in parental leave that parents can now take. Like parents caring for their child on parental leave, military reservists care for their country on military reserve leaves. There are approximately 500 reservists in Calgary. I'm confident that these reservists and their employers are in full support of Bill 1. This is a significant step in the right direction to protecting our families, friends, and neighbours who in turn protect us.

As I have spent time in many other countries, I have witnessed first-hand places in the world that don't have the opportunity to observe the freedom and the security we enjoy in Canada. I'm very proud to be a Canadian. I'm even prouder to be an Albertan. This is why I speak so passionately about this. I give my full support to Bill 1, and I recommend Bill 1 for your full support and voting for the bill in the coming stages.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone who wishes to comment.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. Thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak with respect to Bill 1 and also to rise in support of this piece of legislation. We believe in the NDP caucus that we must do everything that we can to support the good people who make the types of sacrifices that our reservists make and also the sacrifices that their families make when they sign up to serve their country. It is a great testament to their commitment to both their community and to the country in which we all live.

The only real significant point that I want to make beyond the fact that this is a much-needed piece of legislation is that it is a bit disappointing to see how late it came. We are, of course, the second-last jurisdiction in the country to enact this legislation, and it's a bit unfortunate that our reservists had to wait this long. Notwithstanding that fact, we do know that it is absolutely an important addition to the range of supports that we can provide to people who make the choice to serve their community in this way.

We know that roughly 50 per cent of reservists currently hold civilian jobs and that it is very difficult for them to fully engage in that volunteer activity if constantly trying to balance the demands of work. So where possible and where there are more specific duties that can attract leaves, that's a good thing. It's a good thing that they can take the time to provide their service, knowing that in so doing they come back to a secure workplace and a job that remains theirs without any type of compromise.

This is also, as already has been mentioned, a benefit to employers because our employers can benefit from the training that they may receive and from the experience that they may receive through their voluntary efforts. I hope that employers in Alberta will recognize and appreciate that fact. There have been some concerns at different times raised that the leave might actually result in employers being more hesitant to hire reservists if they feel that they may at certain points have to provide leaves. However, I know that that, of course, would be something that would be illegal, and I hope that the Ministry of Employment and Immigration in enforcing this statute and the protection that it provides to reservists will be vigilant in ensuring that the rights of our reservists are protected and maintained through this legislation.

That is really the extent of what we want to say except, again, to congratulate the government in bringing this forward and to advise that we will be supporting the passage of this bill. Thank you.

5:10

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone for comments or questions for five minutes.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009, one that ensures that those with civilian jobs who leave to serve our country or attend domestic emergencies have a job to return to.

These proposed revisions before us remind me of a saying that goes something like: if you don't want to stand behind our forces, then feel free to stand in front of them. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have no desire to stand in front of our forces, and frankly even standing behind them, I'm fairly easy to spot. However, stand behind them I will. That's why I'm very pleased and proud to support these amendments. It only makes sense that if our military reservists leave their families, leave their homes, put their careers on hold, they have a job to return to. Due to the extension of the Afghanistan mission Albertans who are reservists will continue to be deployed, and we need them to know just how much we support them.

The only caveat I can think of, especially while we're in the midst of these challenging economic times, is that an employer might be in the midst of a downsizing, and there may not be a position to return to. I understand – and perhaps the minister can correct me if I'm wrong – that an employer cannot terminate employment with a reservist once the leave is under way. However, if the employer suspends or terminates business, then clearly there is no position for the reservist upon his return, but then there wouldn't be anyway. There are provisions that the reservist does have hiring priority if the business starts up again within 12 months after the end of the leave, and I think that's pretty fair.

I'm also in favour of these provisions applying to domestic emergencies as well as to operations outside the country. Reservists are essential when it comes to assisting in massive fires, floods, ice storms, and other natural disasters. Fortunately, we don't require the domestic emergency reservists here at home very often – and we should be thankful for that – but it is nice to know that they're here if we need them.

The government will have the ability to authorize other reasons for leave depending upon what happens in the future. I think it's very good that we don't tie our hands in this regard. For example, it could be that reservists are asked to provide security for the Winter Olympics in Vancouver next year. By leaving these options open, the government may decide to include this event or any other event in reservist leave.

If these proposed amendments are passed, Alberta will be the final jurisdiction in this country to adopt reservist leave. In preparing for these amendments, we have studied what other provinces and the federal government have done. We've talked with the Canadian Forces Liaison Council and active members of the Canadian Forces to receive their input. We can adopt what could very well be one of the most comprehensive and effective pieces of legislation in all of the country.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to see that these provisions will also apply to reservists who are rangers. Rangers provide a military presence in remote, isolated, and coastal communities of Canada. There are rangers in several Alberta communities, including Fort Vermilion, Grande Cache, High Level, Peace River, and Valleyview.

I understand that there may be some concern from Alberta business over having to find a cover-off while a reservist employee is away on a mission or training, but from my previous experience with human resources I can tell you that any concern is not likely over the six months or year or year and a half that a reservist might be away. In many respects it's managed similar to the way that vacation and maternity leaves are covered.

The concern will likely be over the 20 days of leave a reservist is entitled to in each calendar year for the purposes of his annual training. This, of course, is over and above any vacation that they might usually receive. Many managers will tell you that backfilling for that short period of time is not an easy task, and I would guess that many companies, depending upon their size and resources, will just divide any extra workload amongst others while the reservist is away.

I don't think that the concern is going to be widespread. I have not heard from any business in Edmonton-Calder, and I'm just bringing it up as a point to consider. The bottom line is that if a reservist is making the selfless sacrifice to defend my freedom abroad or to assist in an emergency here at home, I want the reservist to be as well trained as possible. If that means we need to cover off for a couple of extra weeks, then that's the least that we can provide.

I'd also like to provide a dimension on how this proposed reservist leave will benefit Alberta families. It's one thing for spouses and children to say goodbye to a loved one who might not be back for quite some time, but it's quite another for the same family to have to concern themselves with whether their husband or wife is coming back home to the same securities that come with a regular pay-cheque. I know that the government of Alberta, through its agreement with the AUPE, already provides its employees with some form of leave for military service. If Bill 1 is passed, reservist leave will extend for all Alberta employees who are under provincial jurisdiction.

As a former volunteer firefighter I can't begin to tell you how proud I am of our reservists, those who dedicate a good part of their lives to the betterment of this country, to a more peaceful world, and to a safer society. Providing job protection for this service is common sense, and I for one do not hesitate to throw my support behind Bill 1. It is a very important bill for the Edmonton-Calder constituency as the home of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment. I would encourage all of my legislative colleagues, regardless of where you sit in this House, to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to add my voice to the support for this bill. It has been a while in coming, but at least it's finally here, and we in Alberta will be able to recognize the contribution that our military personnel give to this country.

One of the reasons that I feel quite strongly about this is because I have within the last year and a half made the acquaintance of a young woman who is in our reserves and who has actually served two terms in Afghanistan, both of which were outside of the wire. I think we all know that that requires just that extra little bit. I do recall spending time with her when she was going back to Afghanistan for her second tour and the great apprehension that she had going back knowing again full well that she probably would be outside of the wire. It wasn't necessarily based on fear, but it really was based on the experiences that she had had, and there were a couple of close calls. How could we possibly not expect her to do that?

One of the things that we talked about was jobs. I knew what she did as a job. It was a federal job. She said that she had enough to worry about when she was over there and didn't want to have to worry about coming home and not knowing if she would have a job or how she was going to get her bills paid. It's always stuck in my mind, and this is why I believe that this bill is so important.

I'm sure that we're all aware of the equipment that they wear. They've got helmets and goggles and flak jackets and equipment over and above and on top of that and on top of their uniforms and under their uniforms. Quite frankly, I don't know how they move with all of that heavy equipment on plus their guns and their protective equipment. She has very, very long blond hair, and one of the things that she sort of was allowed was that she could let her hair show outside of her helmet. She said that when she walked down the street for the first time on her second return, the women and children would yell her name because they recognized her hair. She realized why she was there: because she spent most of her time outside of the wire with women and children, bringing them in, a lot of negotiations, just working towards having them protect her and trust her. There was a sense that our troops were being protected in a fashion by the people that they served. It didn't always work that way, of course, but they did feel that the people they worked with closely really did appreciate what they were doing and did want their safety.

I'd just like to make a few other comments. In no way do I want them to diminish the positive effect that this bill would have, but I would just like to add perhaps a little more to the discussion. I believe that we should also recognize the sacrifices that will be made by our employers. Certainly, we can speak about Alberta employers. They often lose educated and experienced staff for very lengthy periods of time, in particular those personnel that are officers.

Our employers are very aware of the importance of the activity and feel an obligation to be a small part in the protection of our freedom and that of others in other parts of the world. Certainly, they protect our way of life. I wonder if perhaps there might be some way that we could publicly thank our employers – maybe a website or a newspaper notification, something along that line – and, in particular, small business owners, who may feel and probably would feel a disruption in their business as they release their very valued employees and ensure that our military personnel will have jobs upon their return. We should support our small businesses because it really could be our indirect, small part that we would work towards, that we would pay towards, that we would support towards the people who fight for our freedom.

5:20

I trust that the bureaucratic process will be very quick in implementing this bill. I know that there has been some lagging with some of the other Bill 1s that have been brought forward, and I would hate to see any lagging of any kind. I would like to see this bill passed – we probably know it will be passed fairly quickly, I would assume – and I would like to see that bureaucratic process being put into place so that right away our military reservists, rangers, that have been mentioned, will feel protected and know that when they come home, they will have a job. By having that job, they will know that they are valued in what they do to protect our freedom.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments.

Seeing none, are there any other members who wish to speak?

The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration on behalf of the hon. Premier to close debate.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first want to thank Major Chris Chodan, who is here this afternoon representing all of our reservists. It's individuals like him that allowed us to bring Bill 1 forward. I also want to acknowledge the kind comments that I received from our government members as well as the comments received from the opposition.

With that, I want to call the question in support of Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

Bill 2

Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to move for second reading Bill 2 on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General and to make a few comments about the Lobbyists Amendment Act, which is, of course, Bill 2.

Lobbying is a legitimate activity, and it is more important for Albertans to see that lobbying activities are being conducted openly. The bill deals with strengthening the prohibition against a dual role. The Lobbyists Act prohibits individuals from providing paid advice to government at the same time and on the same issue as they are paid to lobby government. This prohibition against a dual role is essentially a conflict-of-interest provision and is intended to ensure the objectivity of advice given to government. Originally this prohibition applied to associates. Not only was an individual prohibited from holding these two roles, but two individuals associated with each other could not do so.

During debate in Committee of the Whole last year many members agreed that spouses should not be considered associates. Following this debate, an amendment was proposed and passed. With the passage of this amendment the concept of associate was deleted from the prohibition, and a loophole was inadvertently created. For example, a person who lobbies under his or her own name would not be prohibited from providing paid advice to government under a corporate identity. Amendments in Bill 2 will close this loophole. Amendments in Bill 2 also give effect to the intent reflected in debate and limit the concept of associate so that spouses are not included.

The proposed amendments in Bill 2 will also make it clear that this prohibition applies to individuals who are paid to lobby on behalf of organizations regardless of their obligation to register as an organization lobbyist. Without this amendment an individual who is not required to register because the threshold of 100 hours per year has not been met could argue that the prohibition does not apply. Bill 2 will make it clear that an individual must comply with the prohibition even when the threshold has not been met. These amendments will provide clarity for lobbyists and will increase compliance and aid enforcement activities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 also contains changes to the definition of public office holder. Public office holders currently include all MLAs, their staff, and department employees and employees, officers, directors, and members of prescribed provincial entities. A revised definition includes individuals who are appointed to government committees.

Bill 2 also deals with the office of the Ethics Commissioner. Mr. Speaker, the Lobbyists Amendment Act will provide the Ethics

Commissioner with authority to disclose information when necessary to enforce administrative penalties. In addition, the Lobbyists Amendment Act will provide that the registrar, after conducting an investigation, will prepare a report of the investigation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 also deals with appeals from administrative penalties. Amendments are proposed to allow an existing body to hear appeals from administrative penalties instead of establishing a new body to hear appeals. Bill 2 also contains a number of relatively minor housekeeping changes, including clarifying language and correcting cross-references.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments in Bill 2 will strengthen and clarify the application of this prohibition against a dual role, limit the concept of associated persons so that spouses are not included, will add to the list of individuals who are considered to be public office holders, allow an existing body to hear appeals from administrative penalties, give the Ethics Commissioner authority to disclose information when necessary to enforce administrative penalties, give the registrar the ability to prepare

reports of investigations, and address a number of housekeeping matters.

Mr. Speaker, with the passage of Bill 2 the Lobbyists Act will better meet the needs of Albertans.

At this time I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 2. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a good afternoon of progress, and on that note I would move that we now call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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