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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.

Wednesday, October 28, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated. Hon. members, I'm going to rise, but I'm also going to do something else which is entirely out of the ordinary. For the members who sit to my right, may I ask you to stand up and move to the left side of the Assembly. [Members moved from the east side of the Chamber to the west side]

Thank you very much. No, I'm not asking the people to my left to move to the right. That would be a coup that I do not have the authority for. That is not part of the whole thing.

Centennial Window Unveiling

The Speaker: Hon. members, the city of Edmonton has given the Legislative Assembly of Alberta a unique gift commemorating the 2006 celebration of 100 years of democracy of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. This kind gesture celebrates the beautiful resources and landscape of Alberta as well as the opportunities and hope for the future of our beloved province.

To my right, on the east side of the building, you'll see two pages standing. I'm now going to ask the pages, Alexandra Candler and Andrea Bailer, to unveil this very generous gift from the city and the people of Edmonton. [The centennial window was unveiled to the applause of members] The generosity of the city of Edmonton and the people of Edmonton lives on, from the canopy over the Speaker's chair, which was donated in 1980 to celebrate Alberta's 75th anniversary, to this gift today. The Legislature and the capital city have been enriched by this stained-glass window, which will provide members of this Assembly and all visitors with a unique view of this great province of ours.

As all can see, in the centre is a figure representing Queen Victoria's daughter Alberta. She receives the viewers with one arm extended in welcome and another full of bounty. Above her the northern lights shine. Flowing through the centre is the North Saskatchewan River. The Alberta wild rose blooms in the foreground, a flower known to grow in challenging climates. The rich colour blocks of fields and golden wheat offered by Alberta symbolize a wealth of opportunity and hope for the future. The red of St. George's Cross extending along the bottom of the window alludes to the arms of the Hudson's Bay Company and the progressive industry which founded the city. The theme of the window's design is Alberta: the Land of Opportunities, which is a true reflection of the Alberta we live in today.

The stained-glass window is located on the east side of the Assembly, and the question is: why on the east side of the Assembly? It is to catch the morning sun and the dawning of the day as the picture itself was done to commemorate the dawning of the new province of Alberta 100 and some-odd years ago and the opportunities to go with it.

I'd ask members to return to their places, and I will continue with some introductions. [Members returned to their desks]

Hon. members, this process began a number of years ago when the chair was visited by a number of councillors from the city of Edmonton. There are three councillors in the city of Edmonton who

are former Members of this Legislative Assembly: Councillor Karen Leibovici, Councillor Linda Sloan, and Councillor Ed Gibbons. Along with the mayor, over time discussions occurred as to what would be an appropriate gift. The conclusion was that it should be something like what we have received now.

The city of Edmonton then took the initiative through its own forces to meet with arts people in the greater community and selected the artists who created this piece. The artists are Barbara and Pawel Jozefowicz, who are unable to be with us today. I believe that they are in Poland today. We advised them that they can access this channel in the virtual world. If they have, I want them to know that their creativity was well received today.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Joining us in the Assembly today are a number of very distinguished people that I would like to introduce. As I call out their names, I'd ask them to stand, and I would ask you to withhold your applause until we have introduced them all. First of all, the illustrious mayor of the city of Edmonton, His Worship Stephen Mandel; Karen Leibovici, ward 1 councillor and former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta; Linda Sloan, ward 1 councillor and a former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta; Ron Hayter, ward 2 councillor; Kim Krushell, ward 2 councillor; Amarjeet Sohi, ward 6 councillor; Dave Thiele, ward 6 councillor; Joyce Tustian, Edmonton deputy city manager; Blaire McCalla, communications consultant; John Mahon, executive director of the Edmonton Arts Council; Ted Kerr, centennial window selection committee member; Alex Sokolowski, brother to the artist.

Also joining us here today and seated in the public gallery are others directly involved in this very special project: with the Edmonton Arts Council Kristy Trinier, public art director; Laurie Stalker, grants director; Katia Michel-Wasney, grants assistant; David Turnbull, public art conservator; Sean Borchert, public art program officer; Sarah Patterson, public art assistant; some very distinguished people who assisted us in bringing this project to fruition from Alberta Infrastructure – Norm Furler, craftsman; Brian Oakley, director; Henry Zuehlke, project manager; Lyle Butchart, facilities manager; Jim Wrenka, operations supervisor; and Peter Caron – along with a number of people from the Alberta Legislative Assembly Office.

Hon. members, I'm going to ask all of our guests to receive our warm welcome.

Thank you, all. Thank you very much, again, to the people of Edmonton and the city of Edmonton for this generous contribution.

Hon. members, 2005 was the 100th anniversary of the province of Alberta, 2006 was the 100th anniversary of the first Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, and 2012 will be the 100th anniversary of the existence of this building. In the next several years additional projects will be initiated to reach us in the year 2012.

Thank you.

1:40

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great for me to be able to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 88 students from Innisfail middle school who are seated in the members' gallery. They're accompanied by their teachers and parent helpers Mrs. Judy Bourne, Ms Kim Morison, Mrs. Dale Jensen, Mrs. Rosemarie Piezchalski, Mrs. Dusty Daines, Mrs. Carolyn Flower, Miss Jennifer Mann, Mr. Gord Tulk,

Mr. Calvin Bacque, Mrs. Connie Johnston, Mrs. Sherry Hunley, Mrs. Yvonne Bradshaw, Mrs. Jenna Grant, Mrs. Stacy Koenning, and Mrs. Val Layden. Today the students had the opportunity to tour this beautiful building and participate in a mock Legislature. I had a chance to meet with them briefly this afternoon. As I've said before, I think it's so important for all of these children to visit the Legislature because, as you know, they're going to be tomorrow's leaders. They're such bright minds here today, and I'd like them all to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very good friend of mine, Mr. John Short, a real gentleman who many Albertans know. It's a real privilege to have a legend here. Of course, you've got to be old to be a legend, and I don't think he looks as old as he is. John has had an incredible career as a journalist, beginning at the age of 15 at the *Globe and Mail*. He came to Alberta in 1959 and has had many interesting jobs in journalism, very accomplished. He worked with TV and newsprint, but he really found his calling when they realized that he had the perfect face for radio, and that's what he did for many years, as many of you will know. He is much dedicated to Alberta, much loved by Albertans, has taken an incredible interest in amateur sports and charities, and now sits on the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, and we value that very much. If my colleagues could join me in welcoming him to the Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Miss Fareeha Saleem of my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. Fareeha is in her third year at NAIT, finishing her bachelor of business administration. She is here to write her term paper regarding leadership, and she is shadowing yours truly for some good three hours of the day. I would ask Fareeha to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often a person has in life a friend from elementary school to in your 50s that you meet with and have constant contact with, and today I want to introduce you to a good friend of mine who is exactly that. We went all through school together, raised families together. He's a past mayor of Whitecourt and now works with the Alberta Forest Products Association. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Mr. Brady Whittaker. I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a past assistant of mine, who I lost moving into cabinet. His name is Mr. Marshall Thiessen. He was a great assistant for me in my past four years as a private member. I thank you, Marshall, for all the work you've done for me. He is also a great Flames fan, which is what really endeared us together, the fact that he was a Flames fan. I'd ask Marshall to please stand and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Excellence in Teaching Awards

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Teachers across our province dedicate countless hours to ensuring that Alberta students are engaged and are successful in learning. They spend time in the classroom teaching, supervising extracurricular activities, grading assignments and tests, oftentimes at home, working with parents and families, and generally doing everything that they can to make our children's school life the best it can be. The hard work and dedication of teachers often goes unrecognized despite the fact that they are mentors, motivators, and facilitators to engage our students in developing the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed to thrive in the modern world.

Nominations for the 2010 excellence in teaching awards are now being accepted, and I encourage students, parents, teacher colleagues, and community members to nominate a teacher or principal for their invaluable commitment to education in our province. Now is the perfect time to recognize a special teacher or school principal for their contribution to student growth through innovative or creative teaching.

We have successful students because of the tremendous work of our teachers, Mr. Speaker. The excellence in teaching awards have been celebrated since 1989, with more than 8,500 teachers nominated and more than 400 who have received awards. Last year 365 teachers were nominated, and 23 received awards. I am pleased to rise today to recognize all of the extraordinary teachers and principals across this province and encourage you to nominate a deserving teacher.

Thank you.

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

Public Consultation on Health Care

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This summer and fall I've been touring the province to speak with Albertans about their hopes, their dreams, their deep concerns with the state of our province today. As part of the process I and my colleagues in the Official Opposition organized a series of town hall forums for seniors concerned about Alberta's health care system, one of our most precious public institutions.

I am encouraged and inspired by the turnout at these forums and by the passion with which these engaged citizens, primarily seniors, spoke about their lack of confidence in where this government is taking public health care and long-term care. Based on several years of personal experience, these citizens overwhelmingly told me and my colleagues that they do not believe the Premier and the minister of health can be trusted to manage our health care system.

These citizens are extremely concerned by the serious shortage of health care professionals across the board in the professions, from doctors to nurses to laboratory services. They're upset about the callous deinstitutionalization of patients at Alberta Hospital Edmonton. They're worried about rising costs and falling quality of long-term care and continuing care while millions of dollars were spent on bonuses, severance packages for senior officials, and public relations.

My colleagues in the health care sector have also expressed fears, bewilderment, and frustration, yet this government plunges ahead, ignoring the good advice of Albertans, discounting the long-term effects of their agenda of cutbacks, staff hiring freezes, and creeping

privatization. Alberta's seniors have spent their lives building this province. At the very least, a responsible government would immediately ensure that there is enough quality public long-term care and home-care services for our seniors. This would be a huge improvement over the flawed first-bed policy of this administration, which too often separates seniors from their families and supports.

A responsible government would also ensure that every Albertan has a family doctor, which would improve care, reduce overcrowding in emergencies, and reduce hospitalization. A responsible government would listen to seniors, welcome professional advice, and stop this chaotic experiment with our most cherished public health system.

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

Terra Centre Diaper Drive

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I participated in an event called Baby Heroes to raise diapers and awareness for the Terra Centre for pregnant and parenting teens. As a grandpa of two little boys, Dominic and Orion, I know how tough it is for their parents to make ends meet and provide the best for their children.

My wife, Barb, and I decided in good humour to see how many diapers we could get into my Smart car and donate them to Terra. I mentioned this to a friend on a social media site, and within four hours we had raised 2,000 diapers. The goal then became 10,000, and when all was said and done, people as close as this Chamber and as far away as southern California contributed both money and diapers.

I am very pleased to report that last Friday we delivered 12,064 diapers to the Terra Baby Heroes collection centre in West Edmonton Mall. We loaded the car, and we quickly realized that we could not carry the diapers in one load, so we made two trips from the parking lot into the mall without major incident.

Most of the support for this event was generated on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. It is said that it takes a village to raise a child, and last week we proved that the social media community has become a very important part of the village. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the Baby Heroes diaper drive for making it the huge success that it was. By supporting Terra, you have given teen parents and their babies a real chance to succeed.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over and over again in the past few days this health minister's excuse for long lineups at immunization clinics has been that they only had a few days' notice of an early release of the vaccine. However, in a national news story of September 16 the chief public health officer said, "Seven to 10 million doses . . . should roll out by the third week of October." To the minister of health. Both Health Canada and national news agencies were telling Canadians in mid-September that the vaccine would be available the third week of October. Either the minister was unaware and therefore incompetent or he's deliberately misleading the public. Which is it, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess one of the things that's really bothered me in the last couple of days is that we have an

individual who has training as a public health doctor in this province. This is an individual who is choosing to politicize an event that thousands and tens of thousands of Albertans believe is serious enough that they have to get immunized, and that's a good thing. Now, we can stand here all day and argue about semantics, about whether or not the vaccine was going to arrive at the end of October or it was going to arrive in November, but the reality of it is that we have the vaccine, we are immunizing Albertans, we are trying to provide priority for those who need it first, and it is an incredible success.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this government's own pandemic plan indicates up to 11,400 hospitalizations needed. Will the minister tell this Assembly how many of Alberta's acute-care beds will be available for H1N1 surge?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been consistent in saying that if they are required, we will ensure that they're available. There has been no indication to date that that's the case. Again, this particular member, instead of taking a responsible approach to this, is trying to politicize an event. I would suggest that if the member really cared about this issue, he would be standing in this House and he would be expressing his appreciation to all of those front-line health care workers who are busting their butts.

Dr. Swann: This minister's own pandemic response states, "It is expected Alberta's total hospitalizations will range between 3,800 [and] 11,400 . . . of whom 15 to 25 per cent will [need] intensive care." Alberta's major hospitals and intensive care units are routinely at a hundred per cent capacity, Mr. Minister. Where are you going to find 570 beds for intensive care patients?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, what we intend to do is ensure that as many Albertans as possible get vaccinated so that as few as possible have to use our health care system. Wouldn't that be the ultimate thing that we should all be striving for instead of standing in this Legislature spreading fear, I would probably say even misinformation in most instances? I think it's irresponsible, especially for someone who has the training that this particular individual has.

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

Continuing Care for Seniors

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer I travelled Alberta and met thousands of seniors at seniors' forums. After meeting and speaking with so many concerned and angry Albertans, one thing is clear: Alberta seniors do not agree with this minister on continuing care. To the minister. Moving seniors' public long-term care facilities to private designated assisted living facilities will drain the savings of significant numbers of seniors. How can you justify this?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've said on a number of occasions in this House that what this government is going to do is move the care to the patient and quit taking the patient and sticking them in a square hole in the system somewhere. I would challenge this particular member to stand up, and I would say: is he referring to the Good Samaritan Society, is he referring to Covenant Health of the Catholic faith as private providers? They are the entities out there that care about the care for seniors. I would suggest that this

particular individual again trying to politicize on the backs of our seniors is despicable.

Dr. Swann: Well, clearly, this minister is not listening to Albertans. Seniors are being reassessed for designated assisted living facilities after being in public long-term care, and many find they cannot afford the increased cost. Again to the minister: what are you doing to assist those seniors so they're not left destitute in some cases?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I said in my last answer, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is we're going to ensure that the senior has the care where they best need it. If a senior is in a lodge environment or a senior is living in their own home and can no longer function on their own without some care, is this member suggesting that we should all of a sudden take that individual, stick him or her into a long-term home rather than taking a couple of hours and providing the care in the situation that they're most familiar with?

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I would ask whether the minister is building a case for this as a viable option. Is he going to be tracking the number of increased ambulance visits to some of these designated assisted living facilities in order to prove his case and whether this would indicate adequate or appropriate staffing in these institutions as opposed to what they've been getting in long-term care? Are you going to be tracking ambulances?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this minister and this government are going to build a case to provide the right care for the patient in the right place. If he doesn't like it, then I suggest that's something where he should be going out there, not spreading misinformation, and talking about real-life situations because that's what we're seeing. That's what all of my colleagues are seeing in their communities.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Long-term Care for Rural Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate my legislative colleague from Lethbridge-West taking the Minister of Health and Wellness to one of our designated assisting living facilities in Lethbridge. However, I was disappointed that the minister did not avail himself of the opportunity to inspect the long-term care facility with me. To the minister. Alberta Health Services statistics show that rural hospitals have the highest percentage of seniors waiting for long-term care. How can the minister justify ignoring the needs of our rural seniors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons why I didn't visit the long-term care centre is because in the city of Lethbridge this government is investing so much money that it took us an entire afternoon to just go take a visit to the new high school that's under construction, to go to the hospital and see the cancer radiation therapy unit that's about to be unveiled, to meet with mental health officials in Lethbridge. What did I forget, Member? We had a busy day. I just want to take a minute and say that the facility that we did visit, the DAL, which is in partnership with Covenant Health, is one of the finest facilities with the best care you will find anywhere in North America.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that, and I agree. However, we have an excellent long-term care facility in Lethbridge, and you have to see it. It happens to be my alma mater, and you should still see it.

My next question is: will the minister exactly spell out how much he wants seniors to pay for necessary supplies and services such as bedding, incontinent supplies, and the extra care services, which means extra beds and, in fact, could mean feeding . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will take the member at her word that they have an excellent long-term care facility in Lethbridge, and I think that's probably true because we have excellent long-term care centres around the province, but long-term care centres on their own are not the answer.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in touring the designated assisted living facility, we actually went into rooms. We actually talked to residents of the designated long-term care centre, and overwhelmingly their response was, "We love it here," so I would suggest that that member should start to go visit the residents of that designated assisted facility instead of taking all of her questions from a researcher who lives in Edmonton.

2:00

Ms Pastoor: They say that they love it here because they are in the right place for them. There is still a place for long-term care. It's assessment that decides where they go, not their condition.

To the minister. Seniors who live in seniors' facilities are more at risk than those that live at home. Will the minister guarantee that there will actually be enough supply of the H1N1 vaccine for Lethbridge, which currently has none, so that vaccination programs can be expanded to seniors' homes?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I won't comment relative to what the member said about Lethbridge not having any vaccine. That's not my information.

However, I must remind the member that with this particular influenza, seniors, unless they've got some chronic health conditions, are not high risk. Ultimately, we will get to those seniors, whether they live in a lodge, whether they live in a long-term care centre, whether they live in Lethbridge or they live in High Level.

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

Nursing Shortage

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Mr. Speaker, one of the most significant reasons this government's swine flu vaccination program is so fraught with problems is that Alberta is severely short of nurses. As of July over 500 nursing students can't find work, and over a thousand nursing positions posted this spring have been left vacant. The minister's plan to eliminate nurses has left Alberta unable to cope with the most threatening public health pandemic of our time. Why won't the minister of health admit that he has helped create this crisis by cutting nearly 1,500 nursing positions?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the one part of the member's question is so absurd that it kind of colours everything else in the question. I didn't even hear the last part because the first part was so absurd. Where did he ever get the impression that my job was to eliminate nurses? Now, give me a break. Nurses play an integral role in our health care system. They don't play the only role; there's a role for all health care professionals. For him to stand there and say that I'm trying to eliminate nurses is absurdity at the best.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there are over a thousand nursing positions that haven't been filled because of the hiring freeze. The minister is eliminating nursing positions, and his hatchetman, Dr. Duckett, is part of his strategy.

In order to staff flu shot clinics, this government is taking nurses out of schools, baby care programs, and chronic disease programs, and now it's preparing to redeploy home-care nurses as well. They've hired fewer temporary seasonal nurses for the flu clinics this year. I'd just like to ask the minister: why won't he admit that by eliminating hundreds and hundreds of nursing positions, he has left the health system unable to respond appropriately to this pandemic?

Mr. Liepert: I won't admit it because it's not true, Mr. Speaker. This particular member is trying to take a situation where we are trying to ensure that the right care is provided to the patient in the right environment and somehow suggest that by doing that, it's tied to the most recent immunization that we're currently undergoing. You know, his question makes no sense.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier talked about having to run a health care system and dealing with the pandemic as if they were two separate things. It really speaks to the lack of capacity this government has created. It has had months to prepare. Failure to ensure appropriate staffing levels to accommodate for a public health outbreak has left the system unable to cope. It creates serious doubts about Alberta's capacity to cope with any health emergency, whether it's a pandemic or some other type of emergency. Why won't the minister admit that his scheme to cut nursing positions has left Albertans vulnerable?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, nothing but untruths. Because of the outstanding work of the front-line health care workers in this province, in the first two days of our immunization program we have administered in excess of 100,000 doses of vaccine. In addition to that – and this member would probably like to hear this – we have supplied to First Nations enough vaccine to vaccinate 50 per cent of the population. Many of them are running out of vaccine. That's an incredible success.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Calgary Rockyview Hospital Laser Equipment

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be here representing the wonderful people of Calgary-Glenmore. One thing that we can all agree on as elected representatives is that we need to stay in touch and listen to those people who we represent. Thousands of Albertans across this province want to send the Premier a message about his health care superboard. Health care must be patient centred, not government centred, and the Premier's superboard puts bureaucrats in charge. Albertans want medical professionals in charge that understand their needs as patients. Will the minister of health listen to Albertans and return health care decision-making to local communities?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll just take one member of the Alberta Health Services Board – I think he may even have an Order of Canada – Mr. Franceschini, who's an incredible businessman in this community. I can name a whole bunch of others. If that member wants to look Mr. Franceschini in the eye and call him a bureaucrat, let him go right ahead, because that's what I heard him

say. It tells me he is as out of touch with health care as he was with rural issues when he represented the former constituency.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the minister and all Calgary MLAs were silent when the superboard removed the GreenLight laser equipment from the Calgary Rockyview hospital. Does the minister agree with the superboard in its decision to remove the GreenLight laser equipment from the Rockyview hospital?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, that issue was taken care of a long time ago. I think that was well before the member moved into Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, he needs to check out history.

The minister has insulted the people of Calgary-Glenmore and all Calgaryans by removing the GreenLight laser equipment from the Rockyview hospital. Does the minister consider their health concerns as he does their democratic decisions, as simply the flavour of the month?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the minister did no such thing. The particular piece of equipment that this member refers to was in the hospital on a trial. The company that had it in on a trial had determined that the trial had ended and had made a decision that they were going to remove it unless it was taken on full time. That issue was resolved. To the best of my knowledge it is continuing to operate. I'm not sure; I think the member should be a little more prepared about his own constituency if that's the kind of question he's going to ask.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

H1N1 Pandemic Ethics Framework

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's the Minister of Health and Wellness's day today. My questions are to him. The government's H1N1 pandemic response plan indicates that anywhere from 570 to 2,850 Albertans are going to need intensive care. It also predicts that 130 to 400 Albertans are going to die of H1N1. Given the overloaded intensive care system there will be very difficult ethical decisions. Alberta Health Services has developed a pandemic ethics framework to guide clinical and operational decisions. Is the minister aware of this framework, and can he tell us what it involves?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, pandemic planning is extensive to the point where you should have in place the most extreme situation. I will not apologize for our officials having in place a pandemic plan that deals with the most minor of a situation and the most extreme situation. What this member is referring to is the absolute extreme situation. To stand in this House and say that somehow the department is predicting that hundreds of people are going to die from H1N1 is not accurate.

Dr. Taft: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, I'm quoting directly from his department's own plan. I didn't make the numbers up. They're a direct quote from his department's documents.

To the same minister: given that the pandemic response plan says that this ethics framework can be used to include the public in developing a response to the community challenges created by H1N1, can the minister tell us if the ethics framework will be made public?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't deny that the numbers were in our plan. All I said in my answer was that it is the most extreme situation. I will take the member's question under advisement.

Dr. Taft: Well, let me urge the minister to make this framework public. The government's pandemic response plan says, "By providing transparent, equitably applied criteria, based on fundamental moral principles and values, the Pandemic Ethics Framework will serve to guide the difficult decisions that will . . . be made during Pandemic (H1N1) 2009." Mr. Minister, doesn't the public have a right to know?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, if the member is reading from the pandemic plan, then why doesn't he just photocopy it?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

2:10 Calgary High School Construction

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government announced today that it has signed a contract to begin work on the four new high schools being built as part of phase 2 of the Alberta schools alternative procurement project, ASAP, which will result in 14 new schools. Now, a rumour has it that our Bowness high will only be upgraded after the northwest high school is built. So my question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. It seems like so far phase 2 has just been a series of announcements. When are we going to start seeing results?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're seeing results right now. We made an announcement today on the four high schools that are conventional builds, and Albertans will be pleased to know that the first project with the four high schools came in 40 per cent less than engineering estimates, so we're extremely pleased.

We're also pleased that the ASAP 2 that we're going forward with for 14 schools will provide the spaces for thousands of students in six different communities in the province. They'll be here, and they'll be here on time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My first supplemental to same minister: in light of current global economic conditions and provincial fiscal restraints, will these high schools be financed with borrowed dollars, or are they being paid for with savings that we have in the bank right now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. These four high schools are in our four-year capital plan, and they've all been budgeted for. As I mentioned, there was a 40 per cent savings based on what our engineering estimates were, and that translates into \$40 million of savings to Albertans for these top-notch, state-of-the-art schools, that are going to provide great environments for our students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My final question to the same minister. We haven't heard much recently about the 18 schools being built under ASAP phase 1, announced in the summer of 2007. What is the status of these schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity this summer to tour the schools in Calgary in the first ASAP package. They were ahead of schedule for the most part. They're wonderful looking buildings. They're on schedule, on time. They're going to open their doors to 12,000 students in the province of Alberta. They're about 75 per cent complete at the moment. We're actually ahead of schedule with them, Mr. Speaker, so they'll be there for the students when they need them.

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

Home Moving Industry Regulation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of Albertans have had painful experiences with shady moving companies such as being charged unfair hidden fees or losing their possessions. Just last month the Better Business Bureau's branch for northern Alberta identified home movers as the industry with the second-highest number of inquiries province-wide. To the Minister of Service Alberta. Ontario introduced new protections for consumers dealing with moving companies four years ago. Why has your ministry not moved faster by introducing reasonable rules for the home moving industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the moving industry I am very aware of the concerns that consumers are experiencing with some of the companies that are out there, and we also do know of the good experiences. With respect to consultations and moving forward, as always I meet with many individuals on a monthly basis, and that is a conversation that has come across my table as well. As well, I've written to many Albertans on this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. This ministry seems to be reviewing everything with no end in sight. When can Albertans finally expect action on appropriate standards for the home moving industry? Can you offer a specific date or timeline?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The joy of Service Alberta is that there are so many individuals and so many things that we're looking at, and as a minister it's up to me to make good decisions on behalf of Albertans as to where we need to make good regulations and regulations that don't burden individuals and businesses. With respect, we did the gift card regulation and the payday loan regulation, and those are areas where we had to go in and support Albertans. So as always I am prepared to look at the moving industry and any other number of topics as well.

Mr. Kang: I think it's about time the minister stops looking, Mr. Speaker, and starts doing something about the moving industry.

To the minister again: how many formal complaints against home movers has the ministry received? What kind of action did the ministry take against moving companies found to be engaging in unfair business practices?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, on a yearly basis the number of complaints we get with respect to moving companies is under 50. Moving companies can be prosecuted under the Fair Trading Act.

Again, it is about consumers. When you sign up with a moving company, go and do the research, visit the company. If the company, perhaps, does not have an office and they're operating out of a home, you need to know that information. We have tools to empower the consumer to make the best decisions for themselves, and it's about assisting them to do that.

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

Reservists' Leave for Winter Olympics Service

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The reservist leave act, which was proclaimed earlier this year, allows Alberta's reservists to take unpaid leave to serve our country. There's also provision at the discretion of this minister that allows reservists to take unpaid leave for domestic deployment. To this minister: is this simply just paper legislation, or is there some action being taken here?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, I've recently signed a ministerial order allowing Alberta reservists to help provide what I'm confident will be outstanding security for the upcoming Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Vancouver. I'm told that upwards of 60 Alberta reservists will be part of a 300-member contingent from western Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. One thing this minister did not mention is what sort of time frame is being considered for this particular leave. I'd appreciate his comments.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we can all appreciate that significant training is required for the Olympics, not just for the athletes but for security details as well. As such, although the games are only for a few weeks in February and March, some reservists are beginning their training now and could be away from their employers for upwards of six months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a final to the minister. I appreciate these comments, but at the same time we also must consider the rights of the employers involved here. I'd like to know from this minister: what sort of inconvenience does a six-month leave put on the employer, many of whom might have to hire others in difficult economic times to fill the void?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, considerable notice to the employer is required. First, a reservist must provide at least four weeks' written notice of the date on which the leave will start. In this case, the reservist must also give at least four weeks' written notice of the return-to-work date. I'm very confident that the majority of Alberta employers agree that this might be a minor inconvenience in order to supply some very solid security for a major world event.

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

Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Services

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1991 I suffered a spinal cord injury. After being treated in acute care, I immediately went into rehabilitation at the Calgary General hospital. I was lucky as research clearly shows that it's important to move to rehabilitation as soon as possible. It has come to my attention that lately it is now three to four months for some spinal cord injury patients to get into rehab. To the minister of health: why is care for spinal cord injury patients so much worse now than it was when I had my injury some 18 years ago?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would endeavour to ensure that the member's facts are accurate. I want to check to make sure of that, and I will respond to his question when I have the facts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This delay in availability of rehabilitation services is not only an affront to the woman or man who has suffered a spinal cord injury, but it also adds additional costs to the system as they're shuffled from acute care to home to possibly long-term care and then back to rehabilitation. Does the minister accept that on top of the medical impacts on the person who's had the spinal cord injury, this also seems to be an unnecessary cost to the system?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe I've said in this House before that one of the things that troubles me about wait-lists is that somehow the Canadian way of having to wait for health care is okay, that it's just a matter of how long. I think we should be shooting for a vision in this Assembly that our health care system is there when we need it. So I'm not going to acknowledge that any particular wait time is acceptable. In many cases the member is absolutely correct: wait-lists actually cost us money.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of housing. After people leave acute care, or if they're lucky enough to get into rehabilitation services after this happens, oftentimes what is happening: they are being shuffled off to long-term care facilities, the Bethany or some other places like that. These are often 18-, 19-, 20-year-old individuals. It seems like they're being warehoused. Is this really the way forward here in Alberta for individuals like this?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't speak to why people have moved from acute care to the long-term care that you're referring to, but I can tell you that we do have 1,600 housing units

in Alberta that assist people with special needs, and that would include people that require wheelchair access. I think we do a fairly good job with this, actually. Through our rent supplement program we do assist people with lower rents and with affordable housing.

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

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for the Homeless

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this government truly intended to prioritize immunization for homeless Albertans, special plans would have been made to ensure that it happened. That's what the Manitoba government did. In Winnipeg they set up 30 special clinics that targeted that city's disadvantaged and were open for business yesterday. Here we're having lots of meetings, but we still have no firm date as to when similar inner-city rolling clinics will be opened. Will the health minister explain his department's complete failure to prioritize this particular group of vulnerable Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, we have a very thoughtful plan that's been put in place. It was put in place, as I said to you previously, over the course of several months. We've worked closely with Alberta Health Services officials, with medical officers of health. We've worked with the department overall, the health department. I can tell you that our homeless population is extremely vulnerable, and they were assisted immediately and in various areas of the province. An example would be that High Level began administering their vaccine; that was completed on Monday. We've completed the vaccination program for Fort McMurray. In Calgary, as I mentioned earlier as well, we have vaccine that was available yesterday, and the clinic is moving ahead there.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we still have no firm date for the inner city of Edmonton and when those vaccines will roll out, and we should by now.

Now, former Manitoba Premier Doer started planning for his province's response to H1N1 back in the spring. He then made it a priority at the Premiers' meeting in August. As a result, Manitoba's system is experiencing none of the chaos that ours has this week. Why was our minister of health, by his own admission, caught by surprise when other governments seemed perfectly capable of planning in advance?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as is so typical of these two individuals in that party, the question generally has no resemblance to the truth because it's a known fact that all across the country this same situation has evolved. There are some areas that are better than others, and some of that has to do with population. Some of it has to do with the take-up by the population.

You know, I was interested to read in the local media this morning, Mr. Speaker, a comment by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood relative to the homeless situation here in Edmonton. The next paragraph was actually asking someone in a homeless situation whether the member was correct or not, and that particular person said: no, he wasn't; we actually have a very good working relationship with Alberta Health Services.

Ms Notley: Actually, that person also said that there was no date yet for when the vaccine would be available for her agency.

The government of Manitoba planned ahead, so they had 12 clinics ready to go in Winnipeg alone and lineups that did not exceed 90 minutes. Equivalent preparation in Edmonton would mean that we'd have 13 clinics operating today. In Manitoba they hired 600 retired doctors and nurses who were recertified and ready to go well in advance. Here we're scrambling for staff. Why was this government caught so unprepared for what we've all known was coming?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to answer this question from this member. You really are misleading the public, and you're doing it through this forum. I think that you need really accurate information. We've offered to take these members to the clinics that are available here in the city of Edmonton, through the Boyle-McCauley health centre. A vaccine is being offered through the Boyle centre community organization. As well, we're going to have nurses as of Friday doing outreach on the street, offering the vaccine to homeless shelters. We have the vaccine being offered at Hope Mission as well on Friday for our homeless. So for you to say that, it's uncalled for.

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

Cattle Age Verification

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All my questions are for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. As you know, Alberta has strengthened traceability and quality assurance measures on livestock, specifically mandatory age verification on beef, yet some of my constituents remain concerned that their customers are not asking for these measures, they're not necessary for market access, and they're increasing the cost only for the primary producer. Can the minister tell us: are these measures going to bear fruit in terms of market access, and how are these measures being received to date by our trading partners?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, there is a demand for traceability and age verification in our livestock system. Foreign governments are telling me that the emphasis on traceability and age verification are the minimum requirements for market access. International markets are demanding that their suppliers have strong traceability in place today. I certainly received a letter from the Japan Meat Traders Association applauding Alberta's work on traceability. An unintended consequence that we've derived from traceability is that we hear that the Americans are now buying age-verified and traceable beef from Canada and shipping it into the south Korean market because they cannot supply those cattle from their supply.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent correspondence circulating among beef producers in my area claims that McDonald's Canada actually purchases beef from South America because it's less expensive, suggesting that age verification is not part of their purchasing criteria. Can the minister please respond to my constituents on that claim?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, I certainly can, Mr. Speaker. The e-mail is a hoax. Let me say that again. The e-mail is a hoax. It originally started in 2002 and every so often starts the rounds again.

McDonald's Canada sources all of its beef from Canada, more than 64 million pounds a year. Also, all of their patties are produced in Spruce Grove, Alberta. In fact, McDonald's recently sent a letter to the federal minister as well as all provincial ministers expressing their support for traceability. At this time only Quebec can supply animals over 30 months of age that are age verified and traceable. So it is absolutely a clear indication that the market is demanding and pushing for traceability.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My primary producers tell me that they'd be comfortable with additional traceability and age verification measures if they knew they would be paid for that work. Some of my constituents claim that the cost of age verification adds as much as \$50 per head to a primary producer, yet there's no premium for that work. Can the minister please respond to my primary producers who are frustrated that there's no value for them to comply with mandatory age verification?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, this can be very discouraging. We've provided \$30 million through AFRP 2 and have field staff available to help producers with their own operations. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the cost to age verify is significantly less than \$50 a head. As a matter of fact, a national industry organization estimates the cost at less than \$1 per head.

When new markets open, Alberta has to be ready with the age-verified beef that they're looking for. As I mentioned earlier, there is very little U.S. packer interest in cattle that are not age verified. Mr. Speaker, we need to use every weapon at our disposal to get the livestock industry back on its feet and out of the funk that we've been in for six years now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Horse-racing Industry

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over \$300 million of gambling revenue, \$200 million in the last five years alone, has been directed from racing entertainment centre slots to horse racing in Alberta. The profitability of the industry is declining, fewer people are going, and there are fewer race days and less money bet. Instead of directing money to support the NGO sector or even to create new green economy jobs, the government throws more money at the horses. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: given that the popularity of horse racing has been declining for 20 years, what was the business case for continuing to support horse racing?

2:30

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, horse racing has been an important and integral part of Alberta's way of life for many, many years, something that many Albertans feel very strongly about. It supports revenue that goes to our department, and it supports itself through some of the funds that flow through our department that help with their breeding programs and other pieces of that.

On the business case, at the time I wasn't part of that discussion, but I know that today, as it was then, horse racing is something that Albertans believe in, and we believe in supporting Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Back to the same minister, then: how is propping up a particular industry with \$300 million, 80 per cent of the revenue in that sector, not in the business of being in business? How is that not so?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as we've experienced today: a lot of misinformation. The industry generates \$399 million annually in economic benefits; 33 and a third per cent of the net proceeds from slot machines located at racetracks goes into community investment programs, which benefit all Albertans; 15 per cent of net proceeds is allocated to the track operators; 51 and two-thirds per cent of the net proceeds is returned to the horse-racing and breeding industry. In 2009-10 approximately \$35 million is expected to be returned to Horse Racing Alberta for the horse-racing and breeding industry. Horse Racing Alberta uses this funding for racetrack operations, infrastructure, and breeding programs.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, minister. Those are all the same facts that are in the Horse Racing Alberta brochure that I quoted my facts from.

Now, speaking of picking winners and losers, what makes horse racing so important as to receive the same allocation in funds during a recession when wellness groups or youth recreation and food banks have all had their money eroded? Why is horse racing so important that it gets the same allocation?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta actually believes in living up to its commitments. As far as I know, none of these organizations have received less funding from us. You know, we sit here when the member from the opposition talks, "Let's promote rodeo" because, somehow, all of a sudden that day they – the Liberals, that is – decide that they support rural Alberta. But every chance they get to take a swipe at the hard-working people of this province who happen to be in rural Alberta, they do.

Mountain Pine Beetle

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, speaking about the hard-working Albertans, some of Alberta's most major forest industry is located within Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, Mr. Speaker, as you know. The woodlands manager at Blue Ridge Lumber states that central and northern Alberta suffered another major in-flight of mountain pine beetle from British Columbia and the federal mountain parks during July this year; the mountain pine beetle has gained a stronghold in the majority of Alberta's pine forests and presents a major threat to Canada's boreal forest. My questions are all to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Where is Alberta focusing its efforts against the pine beetle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne is absolutely right. This summer's in-flight from British Columbia is one of the most severe we've had, apparently more severe than the 2006 in-flight. The effect it's had is to push the eastern edge of the pine beetle infestation much further east, now in west-central Alberta between Hinton and Slave Lake. Accordingly, we've moved our control efforts to that leading edge to try to prevent it from spreading eastward into the rest of the boreal or southward into the eastern slopes. Behind that front edge we're working with forestry companies to do salvage operations and then, of course, to replant new forests.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, it's essential that all levels of government and industry remain increasingly committed to fighting the mountain pine beetle. Again to the same minister: does your department have adequate resources to meet this new threat?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has committed very significant resources to the fight against the pine beetle already, and within the current fiscal restraints we will continue to do so. Up to this point this year we have committed an initial \$10 million for our spring campaign. Currently we are mapping out our fall and winter strategy based on the surveys we're doing. On a positive note I can tell you that the federal government has been in contact with us, and they've heard our message. This isn't just an Alberta issue or a B.C. issue anymore; it's an issue of concern to all of Canada. We're working with the federal government to get involved as well.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my communities and our industry I want to thank and encourage the minister and his staff at SRD to continue the fight and to keep up the good work. But I want to know from the minister: how does this specific event change Alberta's approach to managing beetle infestations?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm again that this government is committed to healthy, sustainable forests and, accordingly, a healthy, sustainable forest industry and forest communities. This year's flight does threaten that industry, though, a \$9 billion industry, 38,000 jobs, but also affects the boreal, the eastern slopes, the watersheds, and the habitat and recreation that it provides. We are finishing our aerial surveys. We've been doing that in September and October. Based on that, we'll develop new strategies. Probably we'll do less single-tree removal and more stand removal and also, of course, continue our replanting. But, again, containing the spread of pine beetles is not just a concern to Alberta; it's a concern to all of Canada.

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

Education Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education hypocrisy. Albertans want those in charge of directing our public education system to adhere to high standards. However, this government's approach to education continues to be: do as I say, not as I do. Because the Ministry of Education doled out \$2.5 million in achievement bonuses this year while punishing students with cuts in excess of \$80 million, the minister owes Albertans an explanation. Are these stratospheric bonuses intended to reward senior bureaucrats for their ability to slash the Education budget?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered the question about the \$80 million the other day. The hon. member obviously didn't hear the fact that none of the \$80 million that we've reprofiled in the Education budget has come from the classroom or affected the students. None of it. We went out to the school boards and said: you have reserves in place; we understand that you saved those reserves for certain purposes, but we're going to ask you this year in the in-year adjustment – and an in-year adjustment is never an easy thing or a fair thing to do – to take a portion of the \$80 million, not the full \$80 million, a portion of the \$80 million out of those

reserves, not out of the classroom, not out of teachers, not out of students. So the hon. member has it wrong on that account. He also has it wrong on other accounts, which I hope I'll get another chance to address.

Mr. Chase: Here's your chance, Mr. Minister. The minister has been travelling the province, clawing back the surpluses of school boards that tried to accountably build up their reserves. How can the minister preach fiscal sacrifice to our school boards when he overspent in his own internal office budget by \$2.5 million this year?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would know from my answer the other day that of the \$80 million that we had as an in-year adjustment, we took a full \$24 million directly out of the department's budget so that we wouldn't have to pass as much on to the school system: \$24 million. That's about 20 per cent of our budget. The hon. member is obviously looking at one line in the budget to see whether there has been management. What he has got to take a look at is the overall budget and understand that sometimes you have to go to extra effort to make sure that all stakeholders are part of a considered and rational process of decision-making, and sometimes you spend some money doing that. We do, and we don't apologize for it.

Mr. Chase: Well, \$2.5 million of overbudgeting in your own office must have bought an awful lot of pencils and erasers.

This minister needs to finally start aligning his words with his actions when it comes to cuts to public education. What concrete assurances can the minister give to students, parents, teachers, and trustees that even more draconian classroom cuts aren't being dreamt up for next year's budget?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, concrete assurance is the Minister of Infrastructure's job, and he just announced today that we're going to be pouring concrete for four high schools in the province almost right away. We're moving ahead to make sure that we have schools in the right places, that we have teachers in the classrooms for our students, and that we keep our eye on the real agenda, which is to make sure that the students in Alberta have a good education not just for today – world-class, by the way. People from around the country are coming to take a look. I understand that just yesterday at Bishop Grandin in Calgary were people from Australia coming to see what a great job we're doing here so that they can duplicate it over there. But in response to the spending that we're talking about, part of what he's talking about is the fact that we're also looking to the horizon to make sure that we have that great education system for tomorrow.

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

2:40

Community Initiatives Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's communities are the building blocks for our province. It helps to provide the communities with facilities and resources for Alberta's families. All my questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. How does the community initiatives program strengthen our local communities?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we strengthen our communities by supporting them and sustaining them. We put funds into the programs in our communities as stakeholders, and we invest in those projects that the communities deem to be important. To build us a province of strong communities, we have to make safe communities as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that some changes have been made to the CIP program. How will these recent changes affect the CIP program?

Mr. Blackett: Well, first of all, in consultations around the province with different stakeholders and the not-for-profit community, we realized that we had to make some changes to make it more effective for them and to deal with the programs that were funded through the previous Wild Rose program. One thing that we did is move our decisions to a quarterly process so that we can have decisions made and monies funded and expended and passed out to the communities in a more orderly fashion, and it wouldn't be such an administrative burden on our department. We also cut back the amount of money that we were putting out there for such things as schools or a hockey team going to Europe. We want to put that into the community. We have given a group the status of being able to get money on a nonmatching basis, which was available under the Wild Rose Foundation. Now instead of \$50,000 they get up to \$75,000, and for those international projects they still get the \$25,000 that they were eligible for before.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: with these changed deadlines, can you tell me what's happening with the applications of some of my constituents and associations who have already applied?

Mr. Blackett: Well, the process is still a process. What we've done is we've got more resources now. We've got the different granting programs all working together to deliver it better. What is happening is that that means we have more time to work on the actual applications, we have more time to process, and we have more time to actually do some outreach in the communities to make sure that those organizations who are in desperate need, especially today – we have to remember that 5,000 people a month are still coming to Alberta, and that stretches the resources of those great agencies that are already out there.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine, and I'll call on the hon. Member for Little Bow to participate but in 30 seconds or less.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

International Space Station Live Satellite Hookup

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand before the House today to report yet another Alberta first. On September 23 the hon. Minister of Education and I participated in a unique education event that touched the lives of many in my constituency and throughout the province of Alberta. Students and teachers from many of the Palliser regional schools and the community were part of a live satellite hookup with the International Space Station at County Central high in Vulcan. This is the first time an event like this has taken place in Alberta for school-aged children.

Canadian astronaut Dr. Robert Thirsk and his fellow astronauts answered a series of science and technological questions for eager students while they were hurtling live through space at seven kilometres per second.

I became aware of this special project in February of 2009, when I first met with representatives from Alberta Education and the Canadian Space Agency, particularly Marilyn Steinberg. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of them for their dedication in making this project a reality. I'd also like to acknowledge the efforts and vision of Palliser regional school board; Kevin Gietz, the superintendent; and the County Central high school students and staff, who were staunch supporters of this learning opportunity.

The support demonstrated by our government recognizes our government's goal to ensure that Alberta students are unique and receive stimulating learning opportunities. Through the SuperNet students in rural Alberta can receive the same opportunities in education as those in urban centres throughout the rest of the province. I rise today to honour the many people in education who continue to contribute greatly to our students' educational experience and to congratulate the Palliser regional school board, County Central high, and the community of Vulcan, which hosted this once-in-a-lifetime event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I take it the hon. member communicated with Mr. Spock.

Mr. McFarland: "Live long and prosper," he said.

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

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise to acknowledge Breast Cancer Awareness Month, which was established to promote awareness of breast cancer and to raise funds for breast cancer research. In Alberta about 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer during their lifetime, so early detection is vital. Screening mammograms can usually find breast cancers several years before they can be felt. Early detection through a mammogram means early treatment, and early treatment means a better chance of survival.

Through the Alberta breast cancer screening program Alberta Health Services is encouraging all women aged 50 to 69 to have a mammogram at least every two years. Women aged 40 to 49 and aged 70 and older should talk to their health care provider about the need for a mammogram. In addition, all women should follow a healthy lifestyle that, one, eliminates smoking, two, limits alcohol consumption, and three, includes a healthy diet and regular exercise.

While breast cancer death rates are declining – and that's good news – we must continue to take steps to prevent this disease and reduce its impact on women in our province.

Thank you.

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

The Doorway Street Youth Transition Program

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize an exceptional Calgary organization, The Doorway, which helps young adults living on the streets successfully move into mainstream society. Over the weekend I had the honour of participating in The Doorway's annual walk and run. I must

confess that I walked. The Doorway, made up of four staff members and 10 community volunteers, was founded as an experiment in social change in 1988. Its initial goal was to test a cost-effective model for assisting street youth in becoming self-sufficient and productive members of society.

I especially like the fact that their method helps promote self-determination, ownership of the individual's life, and, perhaps most important, accountability for one's choices. Mr. Speaker, The Doorway has had a high success rate in getting youth off the streets and helping them stay off the streets. In fact, over the past 21 years 700 young people have successfully transitioned off the street.

Mr. Speaker, the event was not just about raising money, though. It was about a series of steps towards empowerment. Every step we took was a step towards breaking down barriers, a step towards a less judgmental society, towards breaking down stereotypes, a step towards progress in personal responsibility, a step towards empowerment and towards unleashing the vast potential of those in the midst of challenging times, and a step towards reaching out to those who feel forgotten and offering them a small piece of our hearts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 55 and section 6(4)(d) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act it is my pleasure to rise today and table the 2008-09 annual report of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. The report is available on the committee website, and copies will be distributed to all members today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister and staff of Alberta Finance and Enterprise and the Alberta Investment Management Corporation as well as the staff from the office of the Auditor General and the Legislative Assembly Office for the dedicated support they provided to the committee throughout the year.

Thank you.

2:50 Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 122 people. The petition calls for the rights of currently practising massage therapists to be grandfathered so that the therapists may upgrade their skills gradually without losing the right to practise while the upgrades are taking place.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, object to the development and use of nuclear power in Alberta, and we petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to develop an energy policy which encourages conservation, promotes the use of safe, clean, renewable energy sources and explicitly rejects nuclear power in this province.

The petition has 1,032 signatures.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 209

Children's Services Review Committee Act

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Children's Services Review Committee Act, Bill 209.

The committee shall undertake a comparative review of the provision of children's services by employees of the government under the minister's administration and the provision of children's services by organizations and their employees on behalf of the minister, including but not restricted to the quality and effectiveness of the services; the remuneration of the individuals; their training, development, and qualification; their workload and type of work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of the Capital Region Board's annual report for 2008. This report provides a summary of the board's activities during the 2008 calendar year and up to the completion of the growth plan at the end of March of 2009.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. chair of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 16(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act and as chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is my pleasure to table the 2008-09 annual report on the fund.

Pursuant to section 15(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act and as chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it's my pleasure to table the 2009-10 first-quarter update on the fund.

Copies of these reports have previously been distributed to all members.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today from constituents, all of them concerned with the bed closures at Alberta Hospital. The first is from Kevin and Pascal Wallace, who note that

in the alleyways behind our condo, we witness and experience the wandering individuals who are clearly suffering from various mental illnesses. To close more beds is, in our opinion, guaranteed to expand the population of mentally ill homeless people.

The second tabling I have is from more constituents, Ken and Pat MacDonald, who note that they're against the closure and ask to work towards redeveloping Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

The final correspondence from constituents today is from Roger and Georgina Lufkin, whose condo is just down the street from my office. They actually form it as a petition.

We, the undersigned residents . . . petition the Legislative Assembly to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating . . . at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It is a letter that I wrote to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, dated August 7, 2009, asking for answers regarding the \$100 million in five internally restricted funds that are to be liquidated and used to pay down the debt of Alberta Health Services.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Mildred Dunlop in Whitecourt. She has concerns that “the Seniors and Citizens of Whitecourt are in great need for an Extended Care or Nursing Home in Whitecourt.”

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the appropriate number of copies of a letter dated October 27, 2009, from the Member for Calgary-Egmont advising my office of the resignation of that member from the Health policy field committee, effective immediately, is now being tabled as well.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mrs. Ady, Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, pursuant to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation 2008-2009 annual report.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You just tabled a letter from the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont resigning from one of the committees of the House. As is normal, there have been changes.

Committee Membership Changes

17. Mr. Hancock moved:
- Be it resolved that the following changes to the following standing committees be approved.
- Standing Committee on Legislative Offices: that Mr. Rogers replace hon. Mr. Webber;
 - Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: that Ms Redford be appointed to fill a vacancy;
 - Standing Committee on Resources and Environment: that Mr. Denis replace hon. Mr. Webber, that Mr. Jacobs replace Mr. Griffiths;
 - Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services: that Mr. Griffiths replace Mr. Jacobs;
 - Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee: that Mr. Rogers replace hon. Mr. Webber;
 - Standing Committee on the Economy: that Mr. Hinman be appointed to fill a vacancy.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Any participants?

The Government House Leader has nothing further to say. He doesn't want to close the debate because there was no debate.

Shall I call the question, then?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Alberta Capital Bonds

16. Ms Evans moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities.

[Adjourned debate October 27: Mr Campbell]

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and participate in the discussion on Government Motion 16, Alberta capital bonds, an important discussion, I believe, in determining our strategy as we emerge from the global economic downturn. The economic downturn has presented a challenge to Alberta's industries and our government, as it has to many others in Canada and abroad.

While no one fully anticipated the circumstances which confront us, we are in a relatively good position in Alberta. Thankfully we have the sustainability fund to cushion the effects that we face. The sustainability fund is a significant resource for times like this and something that most other jurisdictions do not have and none in Canada that I know of. It is clear that we must maintain and remain committed to replenishing it. The reason we have the fund is the very reason why I'm confident in The Way Forward.

Alberta's industries attract business from around the world, and hard-working people want to establish roots here. We have committed to maintaining a competitive business environment, keeping our corporate income tax low. We will continue to maintain strong foundations for our communities, providing the necessary services for Albertans and their families while keeping the income tax at its current level.

Mr. Speaker, while we find ways to improve the efficiency of service delivery, we also have some continuing priorities which cannot be ignored. We have a responsibility to continue investing in our province and building for tomorrow. This includes, first and foremost, investing in infrastructure. Building infrastructure and keeping our capital plan in sight will maintain a solid foundation for years to come. While our savings will provide a large portion of funding, we can also explore other avenues of raising capital.

3:00

Motion 16 proposes the issuance of savings bonds similar to the Alberta capital bonds of the late 1980s and 1990s, a motion that I fully support. Mr. Speaker, issuing bonds to raise capital has a number of benefits at this point in time and would fund important infrastructure priorities. First, savings bonds would promote savings and provide a direct return to their holders. Alberta savings bonds would be among the best investments one could buy as they would be backed by our government and, by extension, the economic climate that our government promotes. Much of the returns could remain with Albertans, and they would be investing directly in their province's future.

In considering who the bonds should be available to, Mr. Speaker, I believe that individual Albertans and Alberta business owners should have the first opportunity to purchase the bonds. This way, Albertans and their families will have increased savings down the

road. Typically bonds are also purchased by financial institutions for investment portfolios that they manage. Mutual funds, for example, are comprised of a number of different investments with varying degrees of risk, including stocks and bonds. I am sure that financial institutions would be keen to include Alberta bonds in their investment portfolios as they provide a low risk and guaranteed rate of return to any fund. Many Albertans invest in mutual funds with a number of different financial institutions, so it may be appropriate to allow financial institutions to purchase some amount of the bonds, but again I would like to see individual Albertans and their families given the first opportunity since the bonds would be a secure, long-term investment opportunity.

It would also be preferable to allow as many Albertans as possible the opportunity to purchase the bonds. The bond issuance would be structured, then, with an appropriate maximum purchase amount and a reasonable low minimum. This would afford a fair opportunity to most if not all Albertans.

Speaking for my constituency of West Yellowhead, Mr. Speaker, I can say that there are a number of opportunities to invest in infrastructure using capital raised from the proposed bond issuance. Like many constituencies in the province West Yellowhead relies on highways, primarily highway 40 and highway 16. These highways provide transportation between communities and, most importantly, to the rest of the province and across the border into British Columbia. Road infrastructure supports trade for local economies and allows for the integration with the rest of the province in numerous industrial sectors. The primary industries revolve around natural resources as with much of northern Alberta. Forestry, oil and gas, and mining are the industries that most of the communities in my constituency were born out of, and these industries continue to be the main growth catalyst.

The coal industry in Alberta could only grow when the tracks were laid to Edson and Grande Cache and the Edson Trail allowed people to settle in new communities. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, reaching remote areas allows our industries to flourish. Obviously, we've come a long way since the journey through the mud and muskeg on the Edson trail, with good road infrastructure throughout West Yellowhead and much of the province, and we must keep this up. Maintaining solid infrastructure in our remote areas promotes new industries and economic diversification for our communities.

Community-based infrastructure is also crucial for promoting economic diversification. New industries within a community often rely on new people in addition to new business ties with other regions, Mr. Speaker, so it's important to have sufficient community-based infrastructure in place to make all of our communities attractive places to live, work, and raise a family. As we make our recovery, we must remain committed to funding infrastructure that will lay the foundation for future economic growth, and we must be aware of opportune infrastructure investments for both rural and urban areas that will have some benefit to the province overall. With the cost savings that we stand to benefit from, it is a good time to build, depending on, of course, the project. In raising capital through the issuance of bonds, we can provide a great opportunity for investment to Albertans and value that will remain for years to come in Alberta communities.

As we move forward, Mr. Speaker, I am confident that we will keep our priorities in mind and target funds only to necessary and opportune areas. Infrastructure is one key area for my constituency and, indeed, the entire province. The provincial economy depends on local economies, and local economies depend on basic infrastructure to a large extent. We have maintained a commitment thus far, and I trust that we'll keep sight of our infrastructure requirements moving forward so that future generations do not have to catch up on the crumbling roads.

With clear priorities and prudent spending, Alberta will emerge from this economic downturn as strong as ever. Challenges have been thrown at us in the past, and while this one may have been more intense, we are seeing positive signs already. With continued leadership and determination and a resolute commitment the way forward is ever-promising, with new opportunities on the horizon.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing what my fellow members have to say on this matter in the discussion today. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. Okay. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to speak about the Alberta capital bonds.

The Speaker: Well, no. We're still under the question-and-comment period.

Mr. Hayden: Oh. I'm sorry, sir.

The Speaker: That being the case, I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the motion with respect to the issuance of provincial bonds. I want to talk a little bit about the path that the government has been going down in terms of infrastructure, and I particularly want to talk about how that's going to be financed.

Mr. Speaker, it's become clear to me that when the province was actively involved in the pursuit of paying down the debt under the previous Premier, one of the things that was done in order to do that was to minimize expenditures on infrastructure. As a result, our infrastructure aged and required replacement. It had higher costs of maintenance because if you let your maintenance go, then the costs rise, and that's actually what happened here. So we got to the point where although we had paid down our financial debt, the debt on our infrastructure was growing at the same time. We didn't get ourselves out of debt, but what we did do was shift where the debt is. If you double up your payments on your mortgage on your house and you don't fix the roof or the foundation, you have incurred a real debt nevertheless. Even though you've paid off your mortgage, you may not be further ahead. I submit that that's precisely the position that the government put this province in.

Having said that, I am pleased to see that there is an increased interest in infrastructure projects in this province and that there are more expenditures going towards infrastructure, which is badly needed not only to replace the outdated infrastructure that was not replaced in a timely way but also, of course, to facilitate the growth of the province. I also think that investment in infrastructure plays an important stimulative role at a time when the economy is not what it once was, if I can just put it that mildly. So I think that those kinds of expenditures are timely, and I'm pleased to see that the government is continuing to go ahead with them.

I want to talk about the situation around our budget, at least as the President of the Treasury Board saw it when I asked him questions during the estimates debate. I'm going to quote a little bit from *Hansard* from that committee on April 28 of this year. We had quite a discussion on it. I have to thank the minister because he was quite forthcoming, and I got a much better understanding of where the government is going in terms of the budget of the province.

Now, one of the things that I learned is that in next year's budget – well, we knew this from the budget – the government is looking

for \$2 billion in savings. When I asked the minister, he talked about \$1.3 billion of that coming from reductions in the operating budget of the government. So \$1.3 billion of the \$2 billion coming from reductions in the operating budget. Now, keep in mind this is back in April, so things may have changed, but I thought it was quite interesting.

He also talked about the expenditures on capital, and he talked about planned expenditures of \$7 billion, of which he admitted that the government was intending to borrow \$1.1 billion. That means that out of the revenues of the province infrastructure spending of \$5.9 billion would be financed. So at the same time as the government is looking for \$2 billion and \$1.3 of that coming out of program expenditures, they're paying from government revenues from that year \$5.9 billion.

3:10

I asked the minister a question. I said: why not increase your borrowings on the capital side by \$1.3 billion, so it would be \$1.1 billion plus \$1.3 billion, or \$2.4 billion, in debt financing of infrastructure, and you won't have to make dramatic program cuts on the operating side? You know, he said something about how I should probably talk to the Treasurer or something like that, and we didn't really get much farther on that point. But I think that it's interesting and I think that it's relevant here because if by issuing government bonds for capital projects, for infrastructure projects, we can in fact replace some of the general revenue money flowing into infrastructure, which – I don't know if in the province they call it pay-as-you-go, but that's certainly the name we had for it in the city of Edmonton. When you paid cash for your infrastructure instead of borrowing, we called it pay-as-you-go. So instead of \$5.9 billion, we reduce that by \$1.3 billion. Basically, we wouldn't have to cut.

I want to just make this clear that the decision to reduce spending in next year's budget by \$1.3 billion is a conscious decision that doesn't necessarily have to be. The government could, by increasing its borrowing or, I guess, reducing the amount they're spending on infrastructure, ensure that we do not have to make those cuts. In other words, Mr. Speaker, we have enough money coming in in order to avoid any cuts at all to program spending in next year's budget, but we would either have to reduce the capital budget or we would have to borrow more.

It brings me to the question of bonds. I've looked through some of the speeches yesterday and some of the government comments. I'm not sure that I was able to find what the issue was going to be. In other words, how much debt through bonds does the government intend to undertake, and will this be used to offset borrowing in the market or to supplement it? In other words, if we used these bonds to supplement the borrowings we're already doing, it would be possible, in my view, to fund all of our program services in the next year with no cuts whatsoever. There is revenue available to this province in the budget, according to the government's own estimates, that is sufficient for that, plus a considerable amount left over to pay for infrastructure. The question is whether or not the government wants to cut and lay off on the operating side in order to finance more spending for infrastructure on the capital side.

Mr. Speaker, I think that bonds are a reasonable way to go if you are going to borrow, and I know that the government has had a hard time over the last few years getting back to the point where they're even prepared to let those words pass their lips. They used to be dirty words on the government side when I first came here. Now the government seems to have adopted a more reasonable position. In my view, borrowing on the operating side, running a deficit on the operating side, is wrong. It's unnecessary, it's not responsible, and the government shouldn't do it except in extreme circumstances.

But it is reasonable and prudent to borrow on the capital side. All governments do it. Municipal governments have been doing it for many years. What you need is a revenue stream sufficient to retire the debt.

One of the things about major infrastructure expenditures that lends itself to borrowing is that they're often very long-term projects that are used for a long period of time. It's not fair for the current generation or current group of taxpayers to pay all of the costs of a major capital project if it's going to last for 50 years. So by borrowing you spread the costs and the responsibility of that infrastructure over the generations of people that are going to use the infrastructure.

I think that the idea of getting Albertans involved in lending the province money to build capital projects is sound. I have no objection to it, and I would rather borrow the money from Albertans than I would New York banks. I think that it makes sense, so in this particular case, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to support the government's proposal. I think that it's a good one. But I want to urge members opposite to really question and challenge the whole idea of limiting the borrowing on the capital side, spending what could be operating money on capital projects when it means layoffs of employees and rollbacks, perhaps, in their contracts but certainly reductions in services for Albertans, whether it be in education or health care or any of the other important services that the province offers. These cuts are not necessary, based on the information given to me by the President of the Treasury Board, absolutely not required. They are a deliberate decision of the government, which could be changed if a different set of priorities were adopted.

Mr. Speaker, with that, just to indicate that I do think that the bond program, although we haven't seen it in any detail, in concept is a good idea and one that I am quite comfortable in supporting.

Thank you.

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

Then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have previously sent to the table officers an amendment that I would like to propose. When that amendment is distributed, I'd be pleased to argue it.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the amendment is being circulated. Please proceed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. The amendment, which members will soon receive, suggests that Motion 16 be amended by striking out "the issue of Alberta capital bonds," which is an open-ended target, and substituting "the issue of a maximum of \$250 million in Alberta capital bonds."

The concern we have as the Liberal caucus is that the government has collected so much money over the previous 15 years through a variety of revenues, mostly having to do with the good fortune of our nonrenewable resource revenues. We've had a very stable gas economy for a number of years, and our oil was rather stable during those years as well. Unfortunately, when the bottom fell out of the market globally and the government's revenue was reduced to the point where the government is now running a \$7 billion deficit, we're concerned about the government's ability to manage money. What we're suggesting with the \$250 million limit in Alberta capital bonds is: demonstrate to Albertans how well this \$250 million worth of bonds will be managed, and if you can demonstrate a better fiscal track record than what we've seen over the last 25 years, then we would consider raising a higher amount of bonds to support infrastructure.

Now, we are grateful to the government for acknowledging one of the Liberal proposals, and that is the stability fund. Because of the adoption of the stability fund, we have what the government calls a sustainability fund, which, when combined with the capital fund, provides a \$16 billion buffer that other provinces do not have the good fortune to have. However, you cannot brag about your buffer without actually utilizing it for the good of the province, and rather than starting to commit dollars out of that buffer in terms of capital projects or preventing operational cuts, the government continues to talk about how wonderful it is to have that \$16 billion instead of doing something with it. What we have seen already, first out of the chute, is in the Education ministry a cut of \$80 million. In terms of the health care superboard and the reorganization of health care, instead of delivering efficiencies it has delivered \$1.3 billion in combined health debts.

3:20

Now, with regard to the \$250 million being a starting point, what we see is a series of cuts, for example, to health services. We have seen podiatry services no longer being funded. We have seen chiropractic services no longer being funded. We have gone from a need for 1,400 nurses to a hiring freeze, and the only nurses that are currently being sought out to any large degree are temporary, contract nurses. Where the buffer, as I refer to it, the \$16 billion buffer, if utilized strategically, would help offset the need for cuts, unfortunately, the cuts continue. Not only do the cuts continue, but the cost of providing services is being passed on to a variety of individuals. Seniors, for example, have seen the cost of their Alberta Blue Cross health care insurance rise threefold, and this is affecting them very directly.

The government has talked about buffering Albertans, whether it be in Education or Health or Children and Youth Services, where there has been a freeze, from the very beginning of the announcement of the budget. What we're saying with this particular motion of \$250 million is: demonstrate a new track record; demonstrate that that \$250 million will be assigned to very specific projects from which we can see the value.

In addition to the \$16 billion buffer in the combined sustainability fund, various ministries have within their budgets pockets of significant amounts of money. For example, in the health care budget there is approximately \$1.7 billion assigned for capital building. Now, considering that the southeast hospital's costs rose threefold from, initially, in the area of \$500 million to very close now to \$1.5 billion, there isn't a whole lot of wiggle room in that particular budget. It would make sense, as I say, on an assigned basis to utilize a portion of the \$250 million in capital bonds, that we are suggesting, to designate towards, for example, completing the number of mental health care beds that were cut from that particular project.

We're very concerned that these bonds be very specifically targeted and accounted for as part of the fiscal responsibility. We have seen what happens when the way out of a bust is cutbacks. We've gone through it in the 1990s. We saw the beginnings of the centralization of budgeting with the loss of autonomy of school boards to collect the educational property portion of their budget. That used to give them the autonomy to control half of their budget. They no longer have that ability. We've seen the move, as I said, towards the centralization of health care. We're supposed to have faith that at some point the bleeding will stop and the success of the program will be enhanced, but again the government is calling on Albertans to have faith, trust us: we're not going to set any limits to the borrowing or the issuing of bonds.

So the government has gone from its dependence on the fluctuation of nonrenewable resource revenues to its dependence on casino and lottery funds, and now it's hitching its falling star to Albertans investing in bonds.

Now, if Albertans were to look at some of the investments this government has made in the last year and a half, \$3 billion was lost from the heritage trust fund. We've had investments in asset-backed commercial paper which produced disastrous results – for example, Alberta Treasury Branches – and it's the Alberta taxpayers that are on the hook for paying back that amount of money.

Again, what we're proposing in this particular motion is: let's have a reasonable experimental sum, \$250 million, in terms of capital bonds. If this initial amount serves as an incentive for much-needed capital projects, great. Then there will be confidence, and we can guarantee that it will almost be like a commercial for Albertans to see how well the government has done with its initial \$250 million bond investment.

What Albertans have seen over the last 15 years is infrastructure deficits increasing dramatically. In Calgary alone the combined infrastructure deficit of the school boards, Calgary public and Calgary Catholic, is rapidly approaching a billion dollars. The overall infrastructure deficit – and the hon. Minister of Infrastructure can correct the figures that I'm rounding off – is in the area of \$10 billion. Now, that's on top of our \$7 billion debt. We have the unfunded liability in the teachers' agreement that is in the area of \$10 billion. The point I'm trying to make here is that when you combine our current deficit of \$7 billion with the \$20 billion that I have pointed out in terms of infrastructure and the education unfunded liability, we're rapidly approaching and surpassing the \$23 billion deficit that Ralph Klein faced. The way out of that deficit is not further borrowing. Therefore, we have to be strategic.

Now, if Albertans are going to buy into the notion of bonds, then they have to have confidence that when it comes to cashing in those bonds, the interest will be there. The government can say: well, you know, look at our total overall worth. If we look at AIMCo, for example, we're looking at in excess of \$70 billion. Well, it's not as though we can take that \$70 billion of government buildings and roads to the bank and cash them in and start paying off the interest on the bonds that Albertans have invested in. The majority of the assets we have are of a fixed nature and are not something that we can, as I say, cash in.

So what we are proposing in this particular amendment is: let us take a \$250 million experiment, a type of leap of faith for Albertans. It's easy to sell the notion of the \$250 million in bonds. Building a Better Alberta, for example, might be the slogan. But if Albertans are going to be convinced that they've paid out their taxes – they've heard the Auditor General's reports about billions of royalty dollars not being collected according to the old royalty system, and now they've seen five changes to the current royalty system. They've lost faith in the government's ability to manage our resource wealth. They have been lining up for days in the cold around the outside of shopping centres to get simple flu inoculations. They have seen a lack of efficiencies in a number of government departments. They have witnessed \$44 million of bonusing going out in the midst of a recession.

3:30

So the Alberta taxpayer has to have a reason to, I would suggest, re-invest in the Alberta process. It is for that reason that we're saying: start with a reasonable amount, a quarter of a billion dollars of bonds. Prove to Albertans how expediently this investment can be utilized. Promise specific school constructions. Promise that hospitals will be built in a timely manner with the capital funds generated from the bond issues. Let them know that highway 63 –

for example, a series of the \$250 million bond issues would be bought potentially by people from the Fort McMurray region to finally see the twinning of their deadly road, highway 63. Give Albertans specific reasons for specific bond issues.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available on this amendment, questions and responses. We're dealing with an amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: I just wanted to say that I think that, you know, it is a good idea that you've come up with in terms of limiting what this bond issue should be, but I do believe that it is something we should very carefully consider, that putting this particular number on might not be the right number. For instance, we want to make sure that the people of Alberta who want to invest in Alberta do have that option. In other words, we shouldn't make that ceiling too low. Yes, this is something new and exciting, and I think it's something that Albertans want in terms of Alberta bonds. Yes, I think that we shouldn't jump into it with, you know, an unlimited limit on the top. But I do believe that that is a number that should be studied, and I would ask that we get further feedback from the finance department on this issue. I do not believe that we should be deciding in this Legislature with insufficient information on one particular limit today.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Others to participate on Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry. I was going to participate, not question and answer.

The Speaker: No, we're still on 29(2)(a).

That being the case, no further questions, I'll now call on, as I indicated before, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, if I may, a clarification: is there not further discussion to be held on the amendment that has been introduced?

The Speaker: That's what I just finished saying, hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Sit down, please. I'm calling on the hon. Minister of Infrastructure to continue the debate on the amendment.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Similar to the speaker previous, I don't think that we have the proper information with respect to what an appropriate limit would be at this time for the bonds. I think that there are questions that would need to be answered and need to be debated and discussed with respect to possibly even numbers of issuances, limits both high and low for investments, and rules surrounding that. So I have to speak in opposition to this specific amendment.

The Speaker: Others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: On the amendment, yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to say that I was pleased to hear from the other side that the idea, the concept, of actually setting a limit would be a good one. The other thing that I would like to see is where this limit is set, despite the fact that we think that a quarter of a billion dollars is a

large chunk of money to be sort of allocated. But this will come back as a bill, so we will hopefully have more specifics.

What I think should happen is that you have the projects on the table. You know what those projects are going to cost and then go to the citizens, to Albertans, and say: these are the projects, and this is how much money we need. I would suspect that the quarter of a billion dollars may well cover the projects that actually the government has in mind.

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

Additional speakers?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall under section 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Kang: No. I will talk about the amendment.

The Speaker: Okay. Anybody want to participate under 29(2)(a)?

Then I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on the amendment.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak in favour of the amendment because that's why we have the budgets, so the government should know how much their infrastructure budget is for the next year. We cannot have just an open-ended bond issue and get faster into debt than we need to. It's a good idea to build infrastructure. I think that in 1993 when the government was cutting back, they cut back too deeply on that, and that's the mistake we made. It's a good idea to issue the bonds and then build the infrastructure when we can build it cheaper, but there should be some kind of ceiling put on issuing the bonds. I'm tabling the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) is available for question or response to the last speaker. Does anyone wish to participate?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffero on the amendment.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of the amendment brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-Varsity. I think this is a good measure that shows a level of prudence going forward that we would be wise to accept in this Chamber. If we look back and simply have legislation written as a blank cheque, where governments can continue to go back to the capital markets on an unlimited basis without having some sound debate in this Legislature on what the ramifications are both for now and for the citizens of the future in Alberta, I think that would be done with great peril.

There is no need to look further than the ebbs and flows of our finances here in Alberta. Over the course of our existence they have tended to skyrocket when oil prices are high and, of course, then plummeted down to the bottom when oil prices are low. What we have to do in this province is find some middle ground where we have a stable funding mechanism in place that goes forward and takes these ebbs and flows of the vagaries of the economy in stride – and we don't need to needlessly herk and jerk – and go forward in whatever direction the economy seems to be going. The government could go forward and plan on a more stable basis. I think that is a direction that we need to go.

As I got to speak to the regular part of the bill yesterday, I was supportive of this bill but with some limits to it, and this would actually be a limit. I know the Member for Calgary-Bow said that this is a new and exciting thing, but I think we only have to look back to 1986 when this was also maybe considered a new and exciting thing that went until 1997. That new and exciting thing led to some consequences. I guess I would caution that lipstick on a pig

is still a pig. If these things result in accumulating a vast amount of debt, although this may look like a new and exciting program now, these vast accumulations of debt will need be paid for by future generations of Albertans.

3:40

So let's watch the way we dress this up. This is debt. Despite that members of this hon. House are trying to put forward that this is some great opportunity, it's debt. Now, hopefully it is financed by regular Albertans, and hopefully we have a limit on it like the one suggested by my hon. friend from Calgary-Varsity. Nonetheless, if we don't accept this amendment, I think it would behoove us in this House to come up with another amendment, another reasonable limit that we can discuss. Should we reach that limit and should we reach a time in Alberta where we have to for the security of our future come back here and issue another round of bonds, then we do so with some sober second thought and some more discussion in this House and listening to our constituents.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.
The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to confess a little confusion here, and I'm wondering if I could ask the hon. member opposite to clear that up for me. First of all, we're debating a motion here, not a bill. The government has proposed a motion surrounding capital bonds, and in debating that motion it would open to all of us to make suggestions about whether we think it should be capped or whether we think it should be, you know, applied to certain kinds of projects. I mean, any member is free to stand within this House and propose to shape the future direction of the government here. I'm a little confused as to the purpose of an amendment at this point anyway.

I'm wondering if that member or other members opposite are aware, because it doesn't seem like they are or that that particular member is, that the government just doesn't get unending, wide-open borrowing power as a result of this motion or any other motion in the House. In order to proceed with borrowing or expenditures, our government has to table a budget in this House, and that gets freely debated. So the point of this particular amendment is kind of missing, at least in my mind, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for the comments. It's just that, needless to say, I think it is imperative on why I spoke to the amendment. Although it may not be specifically the correct time due to the correct channels or even the appropriate time, I think it always is a wise discussion in this House to look at our past financial practices, some of the things that have gone wrong in the past, and maybe what we can look forward to in the future. But if we brought them up at the wrong time, well, so be it. We got a chance to discuss it, discuss sort of the perils of what Alberta has been through, the future as we see it and hope it is. I hope we didn't delay the member from going somewhere else, if he had to be somewhere else, to listen to this. Nonetheless, I'm hopeful that our comments are taken in the vein they are offered in sort of helping us go forward on a reasonable and prudent financial footing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available should there be additional comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Yes. Very, very specifically to the hon. government whip: what we're suggesting is providing structure.

Mr. Oberle: You're supposed to be asking him questions, not me.

Mr. Chase: This is a comment as well as a question, sir. You asked a question which I am providing a comment for, and that comment has to do with providing structure. We cannot simply operate on the trust-us methodology and have decisions made by the government members for which our only input is a discussion in the budget. That's why it's very important that we structure our discussions with regard to the purpose of bonds and the amount of bonds we would consider looking into.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I take it that there's no further comment under 29(2)(a).

Okay. We're back to the debate, then, on the amendment. The hon. Member for St. Albert on the amendment.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments. Firstly, I would just like to thank the hon. Member for Peace River for clarifying the process. Further to that, in reflecting on the amount, I appreciate the need to exercise some caution. When we think of \$250 million these days – as I recall, just a year or so ago the city of Edmonton proposed and is now building an overpass, and I believe the cost of that was \$250 million. Really, \$250 million isn't an awful lot to work with, so I really am concerned that we put such a low limit on it at this point in time. I think that as the hon. Member for Peace River has suggested, the budget is the proper place to get into details of debate on the amount. Therefore, I'm urging members of the House to defeat the amendment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We're in a new time period. We're in a recession. As the hon. Minister of Infrastructure pointed out, we're able now to build, traditionally, I'll add, as opposed to P3, four new 1,500-student high schools at the price of \$93 million. So \$250 million now, where infrastructure is 40 per cent cheaper, will actually have a fairly big bang for a quarter of a billion bucks. It would have purchased for us, using the high school analogy, 10 high schools, much needed, that would accommodate 1,500 students apiece. So please do not suggest that \$250 million will not go considerably further now than it did in the time when that overpass was being costed out.

The opportunity during a recession to wisely invest in capital infrastructure that will have the greatest benefit for Albertans goes without saying, and the idea of strategically investing in communities for specific projects that those communities would like to see built and gaining interest on those bond investments could be attractive if Albertans have confidence in the investments.

The Speaker: There's still time under the Q and A, 29(2)(a) here. No, no, no. That's not correct. The hon. Member for St. Albert started participating at 3:46. There's still time. He gave his debate on the amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity raised questions under Q and A. Any additional questions under Q and A?

Then we're back now to the debate on the amendment. Are there additional speakers on the amendment?

If there are no further speakers on the amendment, then the question will be called.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Speaker: We're now going to return to the debate with respect to this particular motion. The next person up to be recognized is the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak today with respect to the Alberta capital bond issue and a retail bond program for Albertans. This would give Albertans an opportunity to invest in their own province. It would give them an opportunity to be involved in the building of the infrastructure that they all need in their own communities. It's even more critical at times like these that we build this infrastructure.

Projects do a number of things for us in Alberta and for Albertans. The projects we are working on now are keeping thousands of Albertans working. It also shows the commitment of this government to a strengthening economy and to a recovery that will be very well placed. The building and the upgrading that's needed in facilities, as I mentioned, gets many people working. It injects the capital into our economy. That being said, we must ensure that that investment is strategic and that it provides very good value for Alberta taxpayers.

3:50

Investments in services, transportation networks, and facilities is going to meet the needs of a growing population and improve the quality of life for Albertans and continue to support the economy for years to come. We have to remember that many of the investments that we make in infrastructure serve us not just today but serve us for generations in this province, and we need this infrastructure to support Alberta's economic rebound. This is a global correction, Mr. Speaker, and this is a global correction that's going to bring Alberta out stronger than before we entered into the economic correction that's taking place.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

I'll just speak for a moment about: why build? Well, it's one way to invest in our future. As I mentioned before, it generates employment in our province. It's estimated that every \$1 million that's invested in infrastructure projects supports 1,160 jobs. When we break that down and we take a look at what that means to Alberta now for the investment that we're making, this year's investment brings close to 80,000 jobs to the province of Alberta. These include jobs of construction workers, but it's also the spin-off employment in the supply sector and the retail sector. Of course, very importantly, it provides work for the skilled tradespeople that we want so badly to keep in our province and attract to our province.

Alberta capital bonds would be available only in Alberta and only for Albertans, including corporations and Alberta-based trusts. Our finance minister talked a little bit yesterday and has been quoted, and I just want to show my support for some of the comments that have been made. The bonds, of course, would offer a competitive rate of return, and they would be backed, of course, by the province. In saying that they'd be backed by the province, it's recognized worldwide that Alberta is one of the safest investment environments available in today's economic climate. By investing in infrastructure, Albertans would be investing in our future as a province. They would be able to invest and the bonds must be set and the investment must be set at a level that all Albertans have an opportunity to invest and benefit from these bonds.

The 2009-12 capital plan contains significant infrastructure investments. It's an integral part of our economic recovery plan. Over the past three years nearly \$20 billion has been invested in capital projects, and this includes roads, schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure. We can look at the list of projects completed last year alone, and it's, of course, huge: things like fire halls, adding waterlines, paving highways, building interchanges – the list goes on and on – renovations and expansions of health care facilities, openings of schools and adding postsecondary classroom spaces, creating additional affordable housing. All of these projects employed Albertans, and all of them positively impacted our economy.

Work is under way now to establish the 2010-13 capital plan. We continue to invest in infrastructure. The key component of the plan is to deal with current economic conditions, and we're taking advantage of the improved pricing in the construction sector, as has been mentioned. Construction is less expensive, and as stated today in this House, the latest project came in at 40 per cent less than engineering estimates. So we're getting more value for taxpayers' dollars on the projects that we're doing now.

As we look forward at major government facility projects, of course, there are some very large ones out there that we're working on at the moment: the construction of the new remand centre here in Edmonton, 8,000 new child care spaces by 2011 on top of the 6,000 spaces already provided. Health-related capital projects are being reviewed and aligned with the strategic plan to improve the service available to Albertans. I would mention also as we stand in this beautiful building the redevelopment on the Leg. Grounds of new spaces in a more environmentally friendly and energy efficient environment that we're working on. We want to work towards improvements. The results are going to be better systems for our people, better facilities for our people, and an improved quality of life.

Budget 2009 announced that Alberta would borrow \$3.3 billion over the next three years to finance capital investments in infrastructure. The Fiscal Responsibility Act, of course, prohibits borrowing to finance operating shortfalls, deficits in other words, in those areas. However, the act does allow us to borrow to finance capital investment for infrastructure.

The normal way a province borrows is by issuing bonds rather than borrowing from a bank. Bonds can be sold in capital markets, to large institutions, pension plans, and so on, but they can also be sold to individual retail investors. The savings bonds that we're talking about are just that. Both methods are going to be required for the \$3.3 billion. A bond is simply a legal instrument, a promise to pay, that I think will work very well for what we're intending. It can be sold at financial institutions such as banks and credit unions and through investment dealers.

To this point, Mr. Speaker, the province has borrowed \$1.1 billion through public markets. Of course, that was grabbed up immediately because of the safety of an investment in this province. We're considering borrowing the remainder over the coming months. Alberta needs to be able to borrow money at the best possible terms, and we are able to do that because of our excellent credit rating.

Previously issued bonds had a maximum purchase of \$100,000. ATB's recent issue of the government growth notes had a maximum of \$25,000. Having a maximum purchase limit keeps the focus on individual Albertans as investors. I mentioned earlier that it needs to be affordable for all Albertans to take advantage of it and be able to realize the investment opportunities that are there for them.

Long-term planning is key for our province to keep moving forward. We know the economy is recovering and will recover

more, and people are going to continue to move to this province. Right now, even with the correction that's taking place globally, we are increasing our population by the size of a Red Deer every year. The reason that they're coming to Alberta is that this is still where the opportunities are far superior to other areas. We have to make sure we're ready for these people, and we have to have the things in place that they need, from schools to hospitals to roads to public transit. If you just looked at the Red Deer phone book and looked at the infrastructure involved in that phone book, it would give you an idea of what we have to do as Albertans. Before we do anything else, we have to provide that infrastructure for these new Albertans. We need this infrastructure. People will continue to come. We need to be cost-effective and innovative. We're not talking about creating new projects. We have a great list of priorities in the province, and we have a great plan for where the most important needs are. Those are what need to be met first.

We've set the standard in so many areas with P3s, core schools, modular designs, standard designs. We're applying those innovative ideas to health facilities now. We're doing these things in the best interests of Albertans. We're doing it to protect their investment with the tax dollars that they give us to work with.

We expect to be back in a surplus situation, but while we move to that, we need to focus on helping seniors, low-income Albertans. We need to support the services to Albertans that they need the most. I'm talking about health care, education, and seniors' benefits. I think Alberta capital bonds would enable Albertans to invest directly in the province's future, and I know they have faith in that future. They can invest in public infrastructure. They will receive value as a taxpayer. They will also support the promotion of jobs in the province, and they will help us prepare for a return to economic growth. Albertans will know which hospitals, schools, and other public projects they're helping to build. We will let them know that. Individual Albertans can participate, and they can participate in building Alberta's future. Mr. Speaker, I think it's a win for us all.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm pleased to hear that the government has learned somewhat from the mistakes of the 1990s. We got out of that bust period on the backs of public-sector employees. We got out of that particular bust on the backs of seniors. There was a building freeze, basically, during that time period. So the idea of building our way out of the bust does have a most definite appeal.

4:00

As the Minister of Infrastructure stated, the notion that we can get 40 per cent more for our dollar than we could during that highly inflationary time period, driven to a large degree by the government's approval of so many projects going on at the same time that we didn't have the workers or the capital for those projects – the recession has taught us a degree of restraint, and it has also given us some hope for how we get out of our current recessionary period.

I am very pleased that the Minister of Infrastructure agrees with me about the specificity of the projects that we need. Yes, we need schools. Yes, we need hospitals. Yes, we need roads. We have needed those facilities for the last 15 years, and this does give us an opportunity.

I also appreciate the fact that the minister spoke specifically about the specificity of projects. We could issue a series of bonds, for example, that would be, I'm sure, snapped up in a particular community if they knew that those bonds were going to build a

school in their area. This has been the case in northwest Calgary, where parents previously proposed paying half the value of building a school with sort of a bond circulated circumstance, with the government covering the other half. It makes considerably more sense than sending parents out to casinos to pay for educational basics.

It makes absolute sense, and I'm sure a number of seniors as well as juniors, for that matter, would invest in long-term care for themselves and in the cases of their family members. If they could put this money into specific long-term care projects through a bond issue, then it would make terrific sense. So I'm pleased to hear from the hon. Minister of Infrastructure that we are building our way out of this area as opposed to breaking the backs of individuals.

To the minister the question would be . . . [interjections] Just for those who don't know the rules, this is a comment as well as a question opportunity.

Point of Order

Question-and-comment Period

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, the Government House Leader has raised a point of order.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 13 I'd just like an interpretation from the Speaker. This is five minutes set aside for comments and questions, and under the general provisions that have been in play with respect to comments and questions generally, there is a short comment or question allowing for a short response, not for one person to use five minutes. There may be others who wanted to raise questions or comments who are not afforded the opportunity if one member uses it all up with his very, very long comment. I'd just like an interpretation from the Speaker. Usually the comment or question is kept short. There's nothing stopping him from having a second one if no one else wants to have a question, I guess, but for him to presume that he has the whole five minutes to re-enter into the debate is not in accordance with the practice of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I think that the Government House Leader is absolutely right that by tradition the question-and-answer period allows for questions and answers to clarify certain specifics of a particular speech that's been made, but I don't see anything in here that states specifically that a person can't take five minutes to ask the question.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. If you wish to cut down on my conversations, the way would be for more members of the government to participate.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: My question to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure is: do you think it would be valid to have bonds for specific projects that local communities could purchase to achieve the infrastructure in their area that they've been waiting to see rise?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do believe there are some possible merits to what the hon. member is suggesting. My biggest concern, though, is that the priority list that we have in the province with respect to infrastructure projects that need to take place does not include any calculation with respect to the wealth of the people in that particular community. They deal directly with the need in

that particular community. So for a community that may not have the financial ability to raise funds for bonds, it wouldn't necessarily mean that the people in that community didn't badly need a seniors' residence or badly need an elementary school or badly need a high school. I would suggest it wouldn't serve us well to go away from our priority list because it's based on the needs of the people of Alberta.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in debate on Government Motion 16 and to move another amendment to the motion. I have the amendment here. I will deliver it to the table, and then as soon as there is an opportunity to distribute the amendment, I will speak to it.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. We will pause for a moment until the pages deliver the amendment.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment is being distributed now. If I can just grab a copy of it myself – I gave all the copies to the table – I'll read the amendment into the record. I move that Motion 16 be amended by striking out "the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities" and substituting "the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government for a maximum term of 10 years in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities."

Mr. Speaker, the intent of this amendment is in some ways similar to the intent of the amendment proposed by my colleague for Calgary-Varsity, which was voted down in this House a few minutes ago. The intent of the amendment is to put some parameters on this motion that we are discussing in the House today. The motion as brought forward by the government read simply: "Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities."

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the way I read that, there are two clear interpretations that you could take from that. One is that all we're being asked to do here is sort of in principle say: "Well, yeah. You know, it's a good idea, kind of like motherhood and sunshine and puppies and rainbows and lollipops and hotdogs at baseball games. It's a good idea. Yeah, I think I like it." The other interpretation is that we're being asked to pretty much hand over a blank cheque to the government to determine the parameters of this thing as they see fit, and I have a problem with that based on the spending records of this government over the last few years that I've been in this House.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I took a look at the closing numbers on the TSX today just before I got the chance to rise and speak here, and I notice that the TSX is down 248 points today, down more than 800 points from its 52-week high, which I believe was reached just last week or perhaps the week before. It's been on a downward slide for a few days now. Certainly, when you look at numbers like that, you go, "Well, gosh, Alberta capital bond: set period to maturity, set interest rate, backed by the government of Alberta," which despite its profligate spending ways is, you know, judged by most financial institutions and analysts to be in somewhat better shape financially than the taco stand down the street, that sort of thing. It might be a good investment. You know, I might like to go out and buy a whole bunch of these things. But, by the same token, I want to know that five or 10 years hence, on the off chance that these guys are still in power, the government of Alberta is actually going to be able to pay

me back when it's time for me to cash in my Alberta bonds. That's why we're trying to put some restrictions on just what they can do with this motion.

4:10

Now, I recognize the comments of the Member for Peace River, I believe it is, a little earlier to the effect that motions like these are in a sense more principle motions, I guess we could call them, and that the details are to follow, but what we're discussing right now is the landscape of the thing. You know, there's a very different shape to a landscape that's a prairie landscape and a landscape that's a mountainous landscape or a landscape that ends in a fairly big and deep body of water, that kind of thing, so I think it behooves us in this House to put some shape and form on the landscape that we're debating.

I'm proposing that we amend the motion so that it would read, "Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government for a maximum term of 10 years in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities" as a way of doing that. Now, let me explain. When I talk about a maximum term of 10 years in this amendment, I'm not suggesting that we're saying: this is how long the term of each bond issue should be. What we're suggesting here is that this motion give the government a window of 10 years to issue bonds, at the end of which time the government has to come back to the Legislature with another motion saying: we want to continue doing this.

I would remind the Speaker and all members present – and I guess this goes to the notion that if you can live long enough, everything old becomes new again – that we have been down this road before, in fact by the very same name. In 1987 Alberta first introduced Alberta capital bonds. Now, let me see: 1987. That was 22 years ago. That was a generation ago, and the Premier at the time, Don Getty, was leading a government that was racking up – what? – a deficit. That's what it was, a deficit. It was racking up a deficit because energy prices weren't what they used to be. There were a number of other circumstances that came into play that were not identical to what we're facing today. That's certainly the case. We certainly have not had to cope with 20 per cent interest rates or anything like that in this go-round, like we did the last time, but every economic setback, every economic downturn brings with it its own set of circumstances that are unique to that downturn and its own fresh set of hell, if you will, for people who are caught in it, and this one has the potential to do that, too.

In 1987, when we brought Alberta capital bonds in, the government of Alberta was starting on a course, that turned out to be pretty costly in a number of ways, of running successive deficits and putting the people of this province into a collective debt. We all know what the end result of that was. It was brutal cuts and deep cuts in 1993 and '94 and '95, in through there, that balanced the budget – true enough – but as my colleague from Calgary-Varsity pointed out, it balanced the budget on the backs of a lot of people who in some cases are still trying to recover from that exercise today and balanced the budget on the backs of infrastructure, which is what this is supposed to be all about.

We walked away from, we abandoned the savings bond program, the capital bonds, or, as they were renamed in 1997, the saving certificates program, because the province felt at that time that there were more effective ways to raise capital. I think we should remember that in going forward on this because the issuance of capital bonds right now, today, seems to be an effective way of raising capital, but we have been down this road before, and we came to a conclusion, whether rightly or wrongly – it's not for me to say right now – that there were, in fact, more effective ways to raise capital than this.

What that says to me, Mr. Speaker, is that we should not rush headlong into the issuance of capital bonds as an exercise in patriotism and, you know, near sovereignty almost, where everybody is going to rally around the flag and feel so proud to be Albertan, and we're going to get some infrastructure out of the deal as well. I'm not saying that we shouldn't go down that road at all. Far from it. All kinds of provinces and other political jurisdictions do this sort of thing. It has a place. It has a purpose. I think its place and purpose are timely right now. Yes, in general, to use the words in the motion, this is the right way to go but with limits, with parameters, with a leash on those who would spend taxpayers' money, with a leash on those who would avoid spending taxpayers' money today by selling these bonds to raise money that has to be paid back with taxpayers' dollars five years, 10 years, whatever we set the term at, down the road.

The safety and security of provincial bonds notwithstanding, it is very hard to predict where the economy of any particular country or province is going to be 10 years down the road, 15, 20 years down the road. You can say in very broad, general terms that, well, we will have grown, that the trend line will probably continue to go in an upward direction from the left-hand side to the right-hand side of the graph. But what you can't predict is where the peaks and valleys in that upward trend line are going to be over the course of that period, and it's even tougher to make that kind of prediction in a resource-based province like the province of Alberta, where we can live or die, we can sink or swim based on the price of an mcf of natural gas today.

It behooves us – and this amendment is one suggested way of doing it – to put some limits on ourselves today as we debate this government motion, to say that, yes, we approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government but not at any price, not in any amount, not for any, you know, indefinite length of time but for a set length of time, for a set amount of money – well, that one was proposed and already rejected – for whatever parameters we want to put on this. That's the intention of this amendment, saying that we want to change it to read that we're approving in general the issue of capital bonds by the government for a maximum term of 10 years in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities.

In this amendment we haven't placed a dollar limit on it. We tried that earlier, and the House, in its wisdom, decided that, no, we don't want to go that route for whatever reason: we don't have the expertise, or we don't have the evidence to suggest what the dollar amount should be perhaps. We're putting a limit on it that says that we'll urge the government to issue Alberta capital bonds as a prudent way of raising money by going into debt for the next 10 years, but we don't want to go any further than 10 years before we are compelled to revisit this concept and see whether we're still on track with it.

I think that describes the amendment and the reasoning behind the amendment pretty well, Mr. Speaker, and I'll take my seat now and see if there are any questions under 29(2)(a) or if anyone else wants to speak to the amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this is amendment A2.

Just before we ask for Q and A, I just want to caution, as I mentioned prior, that the five-minute Q and A is to ask for comments, to ask for questions of the individuals, and out of respect and fairness to all the rest of the members in this House it's been the practice to keep your questions short. It's not five minutes of another part of the debate. Keep your questions short and keep your comments short as well so that more people can participate.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

4:20

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I need to ask the hon. member for a little clarification of his remarks. And I apologize; I'll paraphrase. I don't have the *Hansard* transcripts here. He said something to the effect that despite its profligate spending ways the government of Alberta finds itself in a financial position slightly better than the taco stand down the street. I think I'm pretty close to where he arrived at. I wonder if I could ask the hon. member what he meant by that. Did he mean, in fact, that taco stands, a euphemism for small business I think was the way he was using it, are generally in bad shape or shoddily managed or anything like that? I hope he didn't mean that. Did he mean that the province itself is in bad shape? I would challenge him to compare us to any jurisdiction in the world and talk about whether we're in bad shape or good shape. I challenge him to find a jurisdiction in North America that's in anywhere close to as good a shape as the province of Alberta.

If he didn't mean that, Mr. Speaker, then did he mean to convey that somehow the members maybe on this side or in this whole House somehow take this whole issue very lightly and flippantly? I want to assure that hon. member that I for one and, I'm pretty sure, the members on this side of the House take this issue deadly seriously. We're talking about jobs, people's incomes, people's family situations here, and we're talking about the path of a government here, whether we should assume debt and a whole bunch of very weighty issues. Maybe the member could read that I took that flippancy a little bit personally or insultingly. I wonder if he would comment if, in fact, that's the way he meant it.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I will comment if he left me any time to do so. Yes, the member was paraphrasing, but I think that if he goes back and reads the Blues when they're available or goes back and reads *Hansard* tomorrow, he will see that I meant what I said, and I said what I meant. I think I was pretty clear in saying that despite the profligate spending that goes on by members of the government opposite – you know, God, look at the budgets for the last few years, for heaven's sake, and the year-over-year increase in the amount of spending that has gone on on this government's watch – most financial analysts, most institutions, perhaps all of them, certainly most of them, would rate the financial position of this province as good, and I said that. If the Member for Peace River didn't hear that, well, it's not my responsibility.

The Acting Speaker: Q and A is still available.

Mr. Oberle: I want to thank the member for that clarification, Mr. Speaker, and I would point out, as he just mentioned, that, well, at least on the days that they were criticizing our spending – I can never remember which day they were doing that. Half of the time last year they were criticizing our overspending, and the other half of the time they were criticizing our underspending, so a very inconsistent message from that side. But I do want to thank the member for his clarification there. He's essentially clarified that, yes, he is treating this whole issue flippantly, and I'm glad that Albertans heard him say it.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Perhaps we could eat up the rest of the time debating which one of us thinks the other is the more flippant in this House. You know, where this member is coming from is rather baffling to me, quite frankly. I don't think I've said anything that would indicate that I am treating this issue flippantly. In fact, the whole purpose of this amendment is to bring some guidelines, some limits, and some sober second thought to this notion that we're just going to go off and

holus-bolus sell bonds until we got no more bonds to sell. I don't know. Of course jobs are involved; of course the economy is involved; of course we have an infrastructure deficit. Gee, I wonder how we got to that point. Was it maybe something that this government didn't do for 15 years? Maybe, perhaps.

This notion of whether today is a spending day or a savings day always tickles me, Mr. Speaker, because I always find it difficult to understand why members of the government opposite seem to have such a hard time wrapping their heads around the notion that, in fact, like any family of Albertans anywhere in this province, you spend and you save and you invest all at the same time. You do all those three things. It's called prudent budgeting. If you don't do those three things, you're going to have creditors coming after you demanding that you pay back your debts, or you're going to end up dirt poor in your retirement.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking on the amendment, I think we should defeat this amendment for exactly what the hon. member who brought it forward said. He said, and he clarified it: I'm not talking about the term of the bonds; I'm talking about how long the government can have to set out the bonds. I think that with just the very nature of the confusion, although it matches some of his other speeches in terms of confusion, this is why we deal with the specifics of these sorts of things in legislative bills as opposed to motions. This is the intent that we're working on, not trying to make it, you know, as detailed as possible and putting a bunch of parameters around it. So I would encourage, actually, all hon. members to defeat this motion based on the argument that the hon. member presented himself.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm just wondering if the Minister of Advanced Education feels that the 10-year period under which bonds could be issued, each set of bonds over a series of 10 years, is an encumbrance on the government. Does that somehow limit the government's ability to fund raise through bonds? Is the hon. Minister of Advanced Education concerned about the need for structure, a plan, a definition, an end date, an evaluation period?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that *Hansard* will provide some clarity to whatever that question was, but I think that the whole issue around financial planning, the whole issue, as a corporation or an entity, around when you borrow and what you borrow for and how long you're going to amortize it, all of those questions, as the hon. minister of finance suggested in her speech – and I would encourage hon. members to refer to *Hansard* about what her intent was upon bringing the motion forward – was to look for advice, to look for some of the parameters, not to change the motion but to look for the parameters around which we might be able to put this forward for all Albertans. I do hope that I will have an opportunity at some point in time to provide my comments on this, but let's speak to relevance in this House and the rules of this House. We're talking to an amendment. Again, I would ask all hon. members to defeat this amendment on the basis of the amender's own argument.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available.

Mr. Chase: I'll try to make my question simpler. Do you not

believe that in the process of providing advice for the finance minister, there is a role for amendments, a role for amendments that have specific timelines or specific structures to them?

Mr. Horner: Again, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about the rules of this House and how we debate issues and a motion. A motion is something that is going to give advice to the hon. minister. I believe, hon. member, that in the context of your speech as well as some of your colleagues' from that side, several times you've talked about putting conditions around and putting certain parameters around the bond issue. In fact, I agree with that. But at this point in time we have no idea what the legislation looks like that we would present bonds to. Why would you start throwing amendments up before we even have any idea what we're going to do?

I think, Mr. Speaker, that the intent of this motion is to put on the floor of the House the concept of the Alberta government looking to offer a vehicle for Albertans to invest in the future of Alberta through capital issuances based on whatever the parameters are that are built into the bond issue itself. I know that my colleague the President of the Treasury Board also talked about the interest rate. Am I to assume that the hon. members are going to now provide us with an amendment that the interest rate must be at some level in terms of the motion? That would be as silly, in my view, as this amendment, before we even get to debate over legislation that we don't have on the floor of the House.

Mr. Speaker, again, the motion is to provide advice to the government through the debate within this House. It's to provide advice to the government in terms of the preparation of some potential legislation that we might do. It is not about cornering the whole issue into a little box before we even get a chance to debate the legislation on the floor of the House. I think that would be unfair to members that may want to become involved in the debate down the road. I think it would also be unfair to do that before we've had an opportunity to hear from Albertans, who are no doubt listening to this debate today and want to have some contact with their personal representatives in this Legislature from their constituencies. I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, that we hear from them about what they feel about this motion so that we can craft appropriate legislation to bring forward something that is of value to this House and can be debated on the floor of this House in a more appropriate manner.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask the hon. minister of advanced education if he didn't just do the same thing that he accuses me of doing with the amendment in terms of making an argument that defeats his own point. If the intent of a motion, sir, is to provide advice to the government, then it would seem to me that included in that intent is the option, the possibility, of this House putting some limits on that.

The Acting Speaker: We are still on the amendment. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to follow up on the comments of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

The Acting Speaker: We're talking to the amendment.

Mr. Allred: Yes. I'm speaking to the amendment.

When I first got this amendment and read it, it was my interpretation that the amendment meant a maximum term of 10 years to maturity. The hon. member in his speech in introducing the amendment has indicated very clearly that he's giving the government 10 years to continue to issue bonds. Mr. Speaker, I would certainly agree with the hon. minister of advanced education that we should defeat this, but I would go one step further, and I would ask that in view of the fact that this is an ambiguous amendment, you rule it out of order.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Chase: Well, actually, I'm very keen, Mr. Speaker, to hear your ruling as to how this could possibly be out of order when it is very specific. There is a time period in the framework of the motion, and it does not tie the hands of the government, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out. They have 10 years to basically pull this province out of its recessionary period by the wise use of capital bond granting. I will sit and look forward to your ruling.

The Acting Speaker: To the point by the Member for St. Albert, the amendment is not out of order.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, I anticipated that possibly the rules didn't allow it to be ruled out of order, but in view of that fact I think the hon. minister of advanced education is quite correct: it is ambiguous, and it should be defeated.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Apparently, it's ambiguous. What within the time period of 10 years, the ability to issue bonds within each of those 10 years, is ambiguous?

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, as I thought I clearly stated, it can either mean a maximum term of 10 years to maturity of a single bond, of a single issue, or it can mean that the governments for the next 10 years can issue bonds. It's that simple. It's ambiguous.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie introduced his amendment, he clarified any concerns about the 10-year period. He very carefully spelled out – and it's available in *Hansard* – that the 10 years is not a maturity factor. In each of those 10 years bonds could be brought forward by this government.

The Acting Speaker: We're still speaking to 29(2)(a).

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, I think that's exactly the point. We know what the intent of the mover of the amendment is, but if you read the amendment, it has two different meanings. It can mean the maximum term to maturity, or it can mean that we can issue bonds for 10 years. It's unclear.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone else wish to speak on 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is starting to remind me of Abbott and Costello: Who's on First, Who's on Second, Who's on Third? Nevertheless, let's just put it to this. We're

making these amendments to try to put some clarity to a motion. Let's not get so worked up about the form. Let's take it for what it's worth and move on from there. At least, that's what I suggest. So when you take one of our amendments, take it as advice for when you're formulating your bill. Let's not get all worked up.

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone else?

Mr. Allred: Well, Speaker, I agree entirely with the last speaker. We need clarity, and it's not clear.

The Acting Speaker: We're speaking to the amendment. Anyone else wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. That's the beauty of this legislative experience: we provide suggestions; we provide clarity. As members of the opposition we have extremely limited ability to put forward suggestions. It wouldn't be surprising if people were discouraged by the amount of ridicule or criticism or concerns that members of the government have on the very few occasions afforded us to discuss the governance of this province, which we were elected by our constituents to participate in.

Now, speaking very specifically to the amendment, with regard to the 10 years it's been clarified. It's each year in any of the 10 years. So that part of the discussion is hopefully over. What the 10-year period provides, and the reason for suggesting it, is a framework. It's a structure; it's a plan; it's a definition. It's a very specific time period. I view it as a stopgap measure. If by the issuance of bonds along with whatever other global circumstances occur – our gas market goes up – this government has not been able to pull us out of our current recession, then we won't need to worry about Albertans having any confidence in buying bonds from this government because this government will no longer exist. It will have been voted out of its current position.

What Albertans are looking for and what the Premier promised to deliver during his leadership speeches was accountability and transparency. This province and Albertans expect a check-and-balance way of operating. Unfortunately, the government has cut too many cheques, and as a result we've got a negative balance. But that's not the type of check and balance that we're looking for within this province.

I attempted to approach it by limiting the number of bonds issued. That was defeated. So what we're proposing instead is to give the government more flexibility, to give them some type of fiscal management credibility, which is hard for us based on what we've seen over the last 25 years. We're saying: "Okay. Here's a defined period. Here's 10 years. Let's get it right within that 10-year period."

As to the notion that this is just a motion of direction towards where the government could potentially head to resolve a position through a particular tool in the tool box, issuing bonds, when it comes to actual legislation, our hope is that some of the discussion that's being held today and was held yesterday and will probably continue to be held tomorrow – what are three afternoons in terms of getting the legislation right?

It's not a problem if you reject an amendment on sound fiscal reasoning and if in the rejection you offer something in its place or amend it to the degree where it becomes more effective. Albertans don't just expect the opposition to be critical. They turn off when they hear: no, no, no. They're looking for alternatives, and that's

what we're attempting to do in terms of the amendments that we're introducing today. To suggest that there is a proper time and a proper place for innovative discussions for shaping legislation just limits the amount of discussion that we can possibly have. While we have a democratic opportunity to put forward alternatives and discuss them and value them, then we need to take advantage of that particular time and particular situation.

4:40

I would like to almost put the government in the reverse position that they currently find themselves. Instead of saying, "Well, this amendment doesn't cut it," work with the amendment or offer an alternative to the amendment that we could all get behind. The idea of collaborating, of attempting to head in the same direction, as our all-party standing policy committees are intended, is probably the Premier's greatest achievement. Yes, the opposition notions can be voted down because of the idea that majority wins, but at least there is recognition, by putting opposition members on these committees, that maybe these elected individuals have something to contribute.

So I would urge when you're speaking against a motion, would you please come up with a substitution, an alternative. Point out the flaws, by all means, in the amendment, such as we have here, limiting at 10 years, but please provide another suggestion, a solution which will enliven our debate and our discussion and potentially give direction to our finance minister for giving legislation that is going to help us get out of the current recession that we're operating in now, partly globally caused, to a great extent caused by in-house fiscal mismanagement.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to talk about the importance of not only the motion of suggesting 10 years of limitation for capital bonds but for the opportunity to discuss the importance of our getting all our heads around the best piece of legislation, going forward, around the bond issue.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment, 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I'm meaning to comment, maybe question the Speaker, but I do need to refer to the original motion for just a second, which says: "Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities." Now, the member in his comments suggested that by having this fight about amendments, we were somehow stifling his ability or that caucus's ability to have input on that issue. I would say that quite the opposite is true. The motion is on the floor. I think the Member for Calgary-Buffalo had it right: if you've got something to say about the motion, let's get it out on the floor, have the debate, and move on. It seems like pretty reasonable advice here.

There are some important questions here. Should it be limited in issue? Should the bonds be issued with a 10-year term, which is what the current amendment says, or should they be issued over a 10-year period, which is different but also a legitimate question? Should they be restricted? Should the bonds apply to an already existing capital infrastructure priority list, which does exist, or do we somehow come up with some other process? Those are all things that could be tabled in response to this motion, which would help the minister shape the coming legislation, which is required and which, again, has to hit the floor of this House. At no point is the government ever going to have some unending, unlimited spending authority that doesn't get back to the floor of this House to be debated.

So I'm struggling, and I ask the hon. member: why the insistence on amendments? Why don't we all get to talk about what we would like to see happen in our constituencies or our province with our seniors? Should this bond issue be limited to Albertans, for example? Those kinds of things. We all want to talk about what good we see or not in this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate that feedback, and I say that with all sincerity. In that short discussion you brought up about five different concepts that could be considered in the creation of the bonds, but the way the motion is stated at this point, it is absolutely open. Do we have general agreement on the concept of issuing bonds? Well, based on our amendments, you can see that we believe the idea of issuing bonds is a good one under certain qualifications. We cannot write a blank cheque without the discussion, so thank you for contributing to that discussion. Those were very valid ideas.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, you wish to speak?

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much has been said about these amendments. I'm not going to make some suggestions, as the hon. member had indicated before, about things that should be in here, but the fact is that when you read this one and as the Member for Peace River has just indicated, it raises a number of other things that have to be described and worked on. If you read the motion that's before the House, it's a concept we're asking to move forward with. Certainly, with the discussion this afternoon you've put on the table some of the things that you would like to see, the fences around the motion, and I think that that's what this whole discussion was for, but you should have been able to do it through your speeches to the original motion, not by bringing in a bunch of amendments.

I would urge the House to not go along with these amendments. I would ask the hon. member if he doesn't agree that it would be a wise thing for us to do what we on this side always do, to go out and talk to the people and see what they want.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I think you've hit the nail on the head. The importance of seeking input from Albertans is absolutely essential but not the type of input that is e-mailed to a website. I'm talking about face-to-face community gatherings, where individuals have a chance to contribute to the discussion. I'm not talking about select invitations. I'm talking about the type of circumstance we have within our standing policy committees or all-party committees where anyone can provide a submission, where anyone can appear before our standing policy committees. In other words, I'm looking for a wider open opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to participate on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are back to Motion 16. The next person on my list is West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: I closed debate yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry. I didn't have that on here. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good thing I didn't leave thinking I was not going to get on the list today. I just want to make a couple of very brief comments today. I won't take long, and I'm sure others will have a chance to get in on this.

As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has already pointed out, our caucus will be supporting this motion and the general principle included within it. I just want to review a couple of sort of general points that would explain why that is. The first point that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood made talked about how it is that the government goes about financing the work it does and the initiatives that it engages in throughout the course of governing and talked about sort of the different funding models for that.

I've had an opportunity to read through some of the comments that other members of the House have made, and I found it interesting that it appears as though the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was actually making points that were not dissimilar to what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was saying. Now, perhaps I'll subsequently be told that I completely misinterpreted it, but I'm going to just take it for what it looks like at this point.

4:50

In essence, you know, he was making the point that if you free up money from capital spending and develop other ways to finance that capital development, instead you can take that money and spend it on direct services, or another way of putting that would be on operating costs. Of course, this is the point that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was saying, that it is not necessarily the wisest course of action in the current economic situation that we're in to insist on developing our capital assets on the basis of a pay-as-you-go model. That's a very, very rich approach to developing capital assets. Obviously, I think we've had all the members discuss the different levels on which those are not the circumstances that Albertans are facing at this point.

Instead, I would suggest that subject to the principles of wise financial oversight – you know, the kind of wise financial oversight that would have ensured we didn't have some of the outrageous executive compensation payout bonus things that we've seen over the last few months, the kind of wise financial oversight that would see us properly funding the Auditor General to engage in value-for-money audits, that kind of wise oversight – we ought to be trying to maintain much of our current operating expenditures and much of our current service levels. We know – I mean, the research is out there – that if you're trying to stimulate the economy, the greatest number of jobs per dollar invested are created through investment in primarily health care and education.

If you're trying to stimulate the economy and trying to support a transition away from a natural resource based economy to a knowledge-based economy, you achieve that through those kinds of investments, so this would be the worst time to cut, for instance, a billion dollars out of our health care budget or additional billions of dollars out of advanced education or out of our schools or, you know, shoving 35 kids together in the same classes because we can no longer maintain or even achieve – we've actually not achieved them in many cases – reasonable class sizes. All those kinds of

things are dollar for dollar more effective stimulant investments, so we ought to be trying to do that as much as we can.

The point that was being made before by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is that rather than taking our annual budget and engaging in a pay-as-you-go approach to capital expenditures, there is room to engage in some borrowing. Let's face it: all we're doing, really, is calling it what we've always known it was, which is debt. Whether you now borrow through capital bonds to finance the long overdue investment in many capital projects or whether you pretend you've eliminated the debt while you meanwhile have an infrastructure debt that is accruing right beside you, sort of like an elephant in the room that you choose not to identify or talk about or point out to the cameras, the fact of the matter is that we had the infrastructure debt two years ago. We have the infrastructure debt now. If what we're trying to do is eliminate that infrastructure debt by proper investment, allowing Albertans to participate in that through the capital bonds is a reasonable way to go, and it's something we all understand. There's a shortage of funds. We need to figure out the most moderate and reasoned approach, and this has the potential to be that.

Now, I of course echo many of the concerns that I think I've heard from both sides of the House with respect to: what's the limit, how many bonds are issued, for how long are they issued, and how far into debt are we prepared to go? I think these are all legitimate discussions that we need to have. Frankly, I think the government needs to make a case for the particular amount that it's looking for and put that information before Albertans so that we can all hear back from Albertans in terms of what they are or are not comfortable with in relation to what wise and prudent fiscal advice we receive. That's the first point. I'm just really reviewing the point again that had been made earlier by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

In addition, in reviewing some of the comments made by members opposite, I did note that the minister for seniors and community living talked about the opportunity to use these funds to invest in infrastructure and capital spending for the care of seniors, and I think that she is quite right. I'm not sure that I necessarily accept her characterization that that's what's happening right now.

I do believe that part of the reluctance on the part of the government ultimately to follow through on their election promises with respect to the opening of new long-term care beds and/or the rebuilding or upgrading of current long-term care beds arises in part from their clear understanding that probably half the long-term care facilities in this province are struggling under the weight of this massive infrastructure debt that this government has allowed to accrue over many years and that, in fact, the current long-term care centres are themselves at a breaking point in terms of their physical capacity.

What we would like to see, of course, is that whether it's long-term care or whether it's publicly owned and operated models of graduated care within the same setting, the government definitely consider using some of these bonds to invest in these kinds of services that will ensure that seniors receive the care they need when they need it – and then here's the key part – without paying a cent out of their pockets for it beyond what is currently in place in long-term care settings.

I would be very concerned if we took this money, if it was possible – and I may be told that it's not possible and that I needn't worry about this, but we shall see – to subsidize private developers and others who are getting into the seniors' housing business and who, as part of coming up with their luxurious apartments, are also crafting these fabulous little contracts for additional medical services that people have to buy. That is not a good use of our money, and

subsidizing those kinds of operations is not a good use of our money. I'm not entirely sure whether the phrasing in the current motion, which talks about public infrastructure projects, would negate that kind of investment or not. I just wanted to make that point.

The final point that I did want to make as well comes again, I guess, from how one defines public infrastructure. Of course, part of the capital plan does include what we have in our caucus consistently characterized as a boondoggle in the making, which is, of course, the carbon capture and storage investment. I would certainly not want to ever see Albertans sucked into investing in something that is so clearly poised to become historic, perhaps, in terms of the efficacy of that expenditure and the value for money of that expenditure to Albertans and the fact that probably there is almost no value for money in that expenditure to Albertans. Again, it may well be that the motion referring to public infrastructure projects and facilities would negate any bonds being related to that particular investment, but if they don't, then that's certainly something that we need to discuss more fully in the future.

Those are all my points for now. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to this matter, and I look forward to further debate and further information with respect to the particulars of what these will look like. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

5:00

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. A question I have that I'll frame to you. I was here yesterday and found the conversation here rather a sea change, one of embracing debt, deficit financing, and wrapping your arms around this in a feel-good way. You probably were paying close attention to this Legislature back in 1999. Some of the members of this House who were here – probably there are still seven, eight, or nine of those members who are still here – can be found in *Hansard* with: we will never go into debt again. I was wondering if you'd like to comment on whether this is a government that is just wisping along with no real direction or whether they just say things to suit their course.

Ms Notley: That's an interesting question, and I'm not entirely sure how to answer it. The reality is, first of all, that when the current government had previously wrapped itself in the cape of slashing and burning and cutting and deficit reduction and the so-called debt elimination, I think the key point here to recognize is that there never really was an elimination of the debt. What we're dealing with now is another way of dealing with the debt that's already existent and that always did exist. It comes down to a question of positioning and spin and all that kind of stuff. There's no question that we're in a position where this government is having to engage in more spin than they're used to – well, actually, I don't know if that's really fair because there's a lot of spin – a lot of back-stepping and trying to recharacterize positions that had previously been quite opposite to what they're doing now.

Having said that, though, I am not an advocate of saying that one only buys a house if one has \$350,000 in their pocket right now. That's not how people finance. One makes sure one can pay the utilities every month, one makes sure that one can maintain that house, one makes sure that one has a payment plan to get rid of that mortgage, but I would not suggest that you don't buy the house because you don't have the money in your pocket right then. I, of course, as I've stated before, fully believe that we're in a situation now where we have to look very carefully at ways to stimulate the economy. I am a firm believer that investment in the public sector

is one of the most efficient ways to stimulate that economy. I hope to see that this will be a mechanism to maintain the greatest level of investment in the public sector that we can in the light of the current economic situation.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Based on your comments, hon. member, do you think the government is heading in the direction of going from *Edward Scissorhands* to *Bob the Builder* with these bonds?

Ms Notley: I worry about the child who is watching both *Edward Scissorhands* and *Bob the Builder*, I've got to tell you, but that's certainly one fair way to characterize it, hon. member. Beyond that, I think I'll leave the answer there.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak on Q and A, 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Chase: To sort of lose the comedy and put clarity, do you believe that the money that would be invested in capital infrastructure through the bonds issuing could then be freed up from our \$16 billion buffer to support operations?

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

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, that's generally the point that was being made earlier today by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. He also referred back to discussions that he had with the Minister of the Treasury Board during budget estimates last spring, where he essentially made that argument, that, in essence, we're spending too much from our operating expenditures on new capital projects. That would be our hope, that this would be a mechanism through which we could ensure that we're not making the kinds of cuts that this government made in the '90s, which we are still reeling from.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On the motion the next speaker is the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to rise today and offer my support for the government motion to issue Alberta savings bonds. The effects of the current economic recession have been felt around the world, and Alberta certainly has been no exception. These have been trying times for Alberta. However, we have reason to be optimistic. Albertans are known for their hard work, dedication to their families, and pride in their province.

In 2003, with the help of hard-working Albertans, our government paid off the provincial debt. Since 2003 we have amassed \$25 billion in savings, \$8 billion of that in the heritage savings trust fund and \$17 billion in the sustainability fund. Mr. Speaker, our government had the foresight to realize that strong economic growth would be interrupted at some point down the road. With the heritage trust fund, the sustainability fund, and hard-working Albertans, our province has the potential to quickly return to the days of growth and prosperity.

One way in which we can take strides towards recapturing this growth and prosperity is the issuing of Alberta savings bonds. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has worked hard to achieve and maintain a triple-A credit rating. In fact, Alberta has the highest credit rating of any

province in Canada. The rating system defines the safety of investing in bonds. CIBC says of investments in bonds with a triple-A credit rating, "Earnings are considered stable, the structure of the industry in which the entity operates is strong, and the outlook for future profitability is favourable." CIBC also says of triple-A rated bonds, "The entity has established a credible track record of superior performance." In this time of economic uncertainty Albertans and my constituents in Red Deer are looking for a safe place to invest their money. To invest in Alberta savings bonds is to invest in Alberta. With the knowledge that these bonds have strong protection for the repayment of the initial purchase and interest, purchasers can be reassured that this is a sound investment.

The reintroduction of Alberta savings bonds poses many questions, including what the interest rate should be and who is eligible to buy Alberta savings bonds. We also need to ensure that Alberta savings bonds are an attractive investment. To do this, the interest rate tied to Alberta savings bonds should be determined through an analysis of interest rates paid by other triple-A rated bonds coupled with an analysis of alternative investments. I have full confidence that our government will consider these two factors and set a competitive interest rate to attract maximum investment and that this would allow our government to provide a secure investment for Albertans who believe that Alberta will emerge from this recession as a global leader.

Alberta savings bonds can be used to fund numerous capital projects in many different areas that will benefit the citizens of Red Deer as well as all Albertans. Furthermore, I believe that Albertans should know what projects that Alberta savings bonds will be used to fund and think that Alberta savings bonds should be used to provide Albertans with better health infrastructure. Alberta has the second-highest per capita health care spending in Canada. However, by many measures our health care system is performing at about an average level. Mr. Speaker, Alberta capital bonds can be used to enhance our overall health care performance and improve our quality of life through capital investments in health care infrastructure. I believe that the Alberta government's Vision 2020 for health care identifies the five key goals to increasing our quality of health care and making the system sustainable. With the funds generated from Alberta savings bonds, we can invest in infrastructure projects. I believe that this will help us achieve our goal of providing the right service in the right place and at the right time.

5:10

In order to improve performance in health care, we need to ensure that Albertans are receiving the care they need in the most appropriate facilities. For example, Albertans can receive a number of services outside of hospitals and long-term care settings. By increasing the number and availability of community-based services such as community health and urgent care centres, we can reduce wait times in our hospitals and long-term care centres. This will improve both the quality and the efficiency of health care provided in Red Deer and throughout the province.

Moreover, our government is already addressing this issue by providing our seniors with more choice and new ways of receiving health care. Under the new continuing care strategy Red Deer seniors will be able to receive health care supports in their homes and communities rather than having to go to a hospital or a long-term facility. Seniors will have the option to get an appropriate level of treatment, which they might have previously accessed in a hospital visit, but in the comfort and the convenience of their own home. In turn, this frees up more hospital beds and reduces wait times for critical care patients in Red Deer.

Another example of the Alberta government's innovative approach to health care is the Johnstone Crossing community health centre opened in Red Deer in 2008. This is a remarkable facility as clinics, immunization, education, counselling, treatment, and support services are all offered under one roof. What this means is that patients will have more convenient, efficient, cost-effective, and timely access to health care, and surrounding public health centres will experience less pressure.

Mr. Speaker, another great example of this kind of facility is in the Okotoks community health and wellness centre. In 2004 this facility was opened in order to provide urgent care 12 hours per day seven days per week. Patients can go there to receive their immunizations, well-child services, mental health services, and speech-language services. Because of this clinic the number of emergency room visits in surrounding hospitals has declined since 2004. This change has increased efficiency and decreased wait times.

Innovations in Red Deer and Okotoks are great examples of improvements to our health care system. The Alberta savings bonds could be used to help provide more facilities like these. This would undoubtedly improve both the access and quality of service in Alberta in keeping with Vision 2020 by providing the right service in the right place and at the right time.

Mr. Speaker, using Alberta savings bonds to provide community-based infrastructure such as physician clinics and urgent care centres, we will ensure that our health care system will be able to handle the population increases our province will experience over the next 20 years. Not only will our population increase; our population will be aging as well.

I believe that money invested in our province through the purchase of Alberta savings bonds could be used to fund health care infrastructure, specifically community health clinics and urgent care centres. This would improve the services provided to the people of Red Deer and all Albertans, improving the quality of life and preparing our public infrastructure for the population growth our province will experience.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time to speak on this very important issue. I look forward to hearing other members' thoughts on Alberta savings bonds.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. Member for Red Deer-South. Just for clarification, hon. member, I believe in the first part of your speech you were talking about the savings that were accrued in the last number of years, and I think you said the figure of \$8 billion in the heritage trust fund. It's my understanding it's \$14.3 billion. Would you please clarify that?

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for that, hon. member. In fact, I did some double-checking on that myself. What I'm referring to is the amount of contribution that we have made since 2003 to the Alberta heritage trust fund. Since 2003 we actually increased the amount by making contributions in the amount of \$8 billion, and obviously in that same period of time was when we accrued the \$17 billion in savings that are now in the sustainability fund. I hope that clears that up.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. A comment, a clarification, and a question. Maybe I'll actually start with the clarification. I support

the Minister of Infrastructure's concerns about only certain wealthy individuals being able to access bonds and therefore enhance their neighbourhoods at the expense of other individuals throughout the province. Obviously, there has to be some kind of a leveller, but we should be attempting to reach the highest common denominator as opposed to the lowest common denominator. We should be able to have bonds that cover both.

Now, specifically to Red Deer, formerly when I was the Infrastructure critic, I had an opportunity to visit the Red Deer municipal airport. They have done some very forward thinking. They've purchased land with the hope that if a rapid rail system does go through, it will include Red Deer, and I know that the economic development from having people being able to fly into Red Deer as well as fly out and connect with the larger world would be of great economic benefit to Red Deer. Do you think of the bond issuing for the Red Deer municipal airport as a priority project? Do you see its importance?

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

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you for that, hon. member. In fact, I'm delighted to stand and speak briefly about the regional airport in Red Deer. As you may recall, the regional airport in Red Deer is unique from the perspective that the signatories, the operators of the airport, are actually a partnership between the city of Red Deer, Red Deer county, and the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce. You may recall that in my role both as the president of the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce and later as the CEO of the Chamber of Commerce I've been a strong supporter of the airport and the infrastructure there. You are correct that they are creative, innovative, and have developed a long-term plan and a vision for the airport, which they're having a good deal of success with.

I guess that when I think about the priorities for how we would utilize the bond issue that we propose, first of all, my reference was to health care as a personal priority, but, secondly, I believe it's very important to plan your work and work your plan. In this case the government has created a long-term plan in terms of capital projects in the province, and it has a three-year plan in terms of specifically what projects would be funded going forward. So even though I'm a homer and love Red Deer, I suppose that, as opposed to suggesting that we would jump the queue and perhaps find investment opportunities specifically in Red Deer outside of that plan, I would have to answer that I believe in the three-year plan, and that's where we need to be.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Thank you. A project that occurred in Red Deer with the best of intentions was public housing specifically built for people with disabilities, and we know that that funding, unfortunately, went astray. Would you put reservations or restrictions on the type of builders or organizations that could take money from the bond issues to create the projects?

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, hon. member. [Mr. Dallas's speaking time expired]

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise and participate in the debate on the government motion. I will be introducing an amendment to Motion 16.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: All right. I will have the pages distribute those. This will be amendment A3.

Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Government Motion 16 be amended by striking out "in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities" and substituting "in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities by Alberta companies."

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the members from the government side with lots of interest about Motion 16, how it's going to help build us all the infrastructure projects such as hospitals, bridges, roads, stimulate the economy, and create badly needed jobs. We have been there before. We have done it in 1987. We issued Alberta bonds, and then they were changed to Alberta savings certificates. It was lots of money: \$5.7 billion were raised by those bonds and certificates in 10 years. It is a good idea to issue Alberta bonds to build those infrastructure projects, but keep in mind that it's not free money. It will be debt we will be accumulating, but that debt will be a positive debt. At some point in time that debt will have to be paid back.

The last bond issue matured in 2004. When we go back to 1993, the whole idea was to cut down the deficit, cut down the debt. Sure, we paid down a \$22 billion debt, but at the same time we created another bigger infrastructure debt. All those cutbacks on the infrastructure projects, on health care, on education – you name it – created a much bigger debt. We haven't even recovered from those cutbacks of the '90s, and here we go again. Because of the fiscal mismanagement of the government, I think, you know, we are in a hole again, and we are talking about a \$7 billion deficit. That's the deficit we know of.

We have been having some of the higher per capita spending in the country on capital projects. The Premier said in a televised address that there were up to 40 per cent savings on the projects' bids which were coming in now. They were lower now than when the economy was hot, so we were committing \$23 billion over three years to build infrastructure projects. If it's coming out 40 per cent cheaper, I think we can stretch our capital projects a little bit further, Mr. Speaker.

We should also have a look at P3 projects. If this money is going to go to the P3 projects, I don't think that will be a good idea. If you're issuing Alberta bonds, that money should strictly be going towards pay-as-we-go projects. The P3 debt has already ballooned to almost \$4.7 billion, and here we keep on talking about \$17 billion in the sustainability fund. My question is: how much money is there in the sustainability fund? Is it still \$17 billion that we have? Or are we taking into consideration all of the debt that has been racked up?

Mr. Speaker, sure, it is cheaper to borrow now, but we have to look at our overall debt, that we are accumulating faster than we think. I wonder what happened to, you know, that \$17 billion. Again, is it still in the sustainability fund? Or have we got \$9 billion left? I hear in the news that there's only \$9 billion left. Somebody says only \$7 billion left. We have to take a good look at all the money we have and all the debt we have so we can have some kind of budget for how much we can issue in Alberta bonds.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there's an infrastructure backlog, and this is the best time to build that infrastructure. This is the best time to catch up on our infrastructure backlog. There were some monies unexpended, for instance, in the Department of Transportation, about half a billion dollars. We should look at all the departments and see if there is some unspent monies sitting in other departments or if the capital projects have been deferred.

Sure, investing more money into infrastructure projects is going to stimulate the economy and create very badly needed jobs. Like the Minister of Infrastructure said, every million dollars we spend creates 1,160 jobs. That's why I'm proposing this amendment, so that we create all the jobs, and Albertans get first crack at those jobs. There are a lot of Albertans running out of their EI benefits, and this will go a long ways to help those Albertans have jobs.

Another thing, I think the hon. member raised a very good point about capping the Alberta bonds, putting a cap on it, like \$250 million. That's why we have the budgets. In the last budget, Budget 2009, the government stated that it would be borrowing \$1.1 billion a year for the next three years to pay for capital expenditures. On September 21, 2009, the government issued \$600 million in provincial bonds to the capital markets. These bonds were issued for a rate of 4 per cent over 10 years and sold out within minutes of being issued. Then an additional \$500 million in bonds was issued on October 7, 2009. That was at a rate of 2.75 per cent over five years. This equals \$1.1 billion. If the government can say in the budget that this is how much they will be borrowing, I think we can have some kind of idea how much in Alberta bonds the government will be issuing yearly. That's the question we are raising. We have to have some kind of plan here because we will have to pay down that debt in later years.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, we're speaking to the amendment. This is part of the amendment, right?

Mr. Kang: That's where I'm coming, sir.

The provincial bonds issued will be for Albertans only. The reason I'm making this amendment is because it will be Albertans' money that will be spent in Alberta on infrastructure projects, so Albertans can benefit from the Alberta capital bonds. If they can do it in the U.S., I think we can do it here, too. It will go a long way to stimulate our economy, create those badly needed jobs, and put Albertans back to work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for comments or questions. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if the hon. member could describe a couple of things for me. The first one would be: what is the definition of an Alberta company? Is it percentage ownership, registration in the province? If they do business in other provinces or have shareholders outside of the province, are they an Alberta company? Are they an outside company?

5:30

The second thing that I'd like to ask him is: is there a cap on the number of Alberta companies that must bid, and if there's no competitive bid, will we be able to go outside for other bids? The other thing that I'd like to know is: given the fact that we have a western economic agreement with the three provinces, are we going to exclude Saskatchewan companies from bidding on capital projects in Alberta that might have Albertans working for them? I guess I'm kind of curious as to how you'd want to do all of that, hon. member. The other thing is: if there's only one bidder and he sets a price so high that it's kind of in the stratosphere, are we going to say, "Yes, that's good"?

The point I'm getting at here, hon. member, is that, again, you're creating an amendment to a motion that complicates the entire

motion and gives no real advice. In fact, your advice is that you would like to have preferred status for Alberta companies in the bidding. That's fine. Put it in *Hansard*. But when you put a motion like this – and I have all of those questions, which, I might add, I believe to be valid – it makes the amendment difficult for us to vote for, Mr. Speaker, and I would encourage all members to vote against it.

Mr. Kang: I think it's pretty clear that when I say "by Alberta companies," the companies should be registered in Alberta and that the majority of shareholders should be in Alberta. That's where we're coming from. You know, I don't think there's only one company in Alberta doing one business. There is more than one company that could be bidding on the projects, and they will be competing for the projects.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Yeah. Just a quick question. By breaking the TILMA agreement, does the hon. member have a concern that what he's suggesting could stop Alberta companies from seeking employment and seeking work outside of the province of Alberta? That would be the result.

Mr. Kang: We're talking about Alberta projects only. They will be Alberta bonds. Those companies will be registered in Alberta, and then they will be able to bid on them. That's what I said. Sure, TILMA may have some effect on that, but I think we should be protecting Albertans' jobs first.

Mr. Hayden: Just for clarification, does the hon. member understand that this completely would go against TILMA, would ruin the relationship with the province next to us, and limit the ability of Alberta workers and companies to bid on business in other spots in western Canada?

Mr. Kang: I understand that, but those companies could be registered here in Alberta.

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would just like to ask the hon. member a few questions and, particularly, relative to this protectionist idea that he's trying to introduce into this motion. Like my colleagues before, the two ministers that just asked questions, does the hon. member not foresee that we would have some backlash from other companies and other provinces and also North American wide? We're also part of a North American free trade agreement. Does the hon. member not see or wouldn't you expect that we would have some backlash and probably take away some of the advantages that you are trying to create from Alberta companies right across the entire economy of this province? I'd like to hear some of your comments on that, hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Well, lately in China they have done it, and in the U.S. they have done it. If they can do it, I think we can do it, too. It will not really exclude our companies from doing business there.

Ms DeLong: I just wonder whether the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall believes that the people of Alberta should have to pay for

something – say that the only bids from Alberta were 10 times as much as what you could get from outside of Alberta. Do you believe that the people of Alberta should be held to that and that they should have to pay that exorbitant cost just because of a policy that says that we have to buy from Alberta?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) has finished now. We'll move on.

Anyone wish to speak to the amendment? Hon. Member for St. Albert, to the amendment.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very disturbed at the tone of this amendment. We've worked so hard in this country to break down provincial trade barriers with mobility agreements, with TILMA. Now we're working with Saskatchewan, even NAFTA. I think this flies in the face of so many things we've decided in this country and in the province in the last 10, 20 years. It just creates a protectionist state. We've really got to vote this down.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Any other members wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I understand the concerns that have been raised with regard to the wording of the amendment. The intention of the amendment was not to freeze out the western tiger concept of dealing with British Columbia or dealing with Saskatchewan through to Manitoba. We've talked in this House before of the importance of trade. What it was trying to achieve – and I will suggest that the wording could have been considerably stronger – was to look at the Alberta advantage and the idea of Albertans having opportunities to not only invest in bonds but having opportunities, as the hon. Minister of Infrastructure indicated, where we would like to see Albertans potentially getting first crack at the jobs. But, obviously, if people are making ridiculous bids, we would not accept those types of bids. Whether it was a priority project or not, it would have to be put on hold until such a time as a reasonable bid was provided.

One of the things that this amendment is looking at is the notion that so much of our infrastructure has been built on lower wages, on non-unionized organizations, on the backs of temporary foreign workers that have had no voting or protective rights as they enhanced our Alberta projects, whether it be the Chinese labourers and workers who worked in the oil sands but weren't paid for their work or whether they were the temporary foreign workers that were brought in and told that they would have certain accommodations and certain remuneration only to find out that that wasn't the case.

What we're trying to do is not build a wall around Alberta, as our current Prime Minister has suggested, and a letter to that effect was also cosigned by our Minister of Environment. Rather than protectionism, what we're trying for is promotionism in terms of promoting the best opportunities for Alberta companies to participate in the process in a fair, compensated manner, not, as individuals have pointed out, to the exclusion of other companies. I'm not sure to what extent or whether members of this House would suggest that all projects that are government sponsored be wide open and that the lowest bid will determine the project versus the quality of the company in order to build the project.

We've got a number of organizations that have offices in Alberta that do building world-wide. The fact that they're registered as an Alberta company would not prevent them from being considered for other particular projects. We have trade offices in Calgary from a whole series of countries indicating their desire to do business with

us, and if they have an established presence or they have shares in, for example, an oil sands project, that would in theory have them considered not only to be a global company but a company operating in Alberta with established offices and established credentials.

5:40

Mr. Horner: That's not what he said. He said majority only.

Mr. Chase: And I take your point, minister of advanced education, that we need to clarify the wording. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall drew somewhat of a short straw on this particular amendment, but the intent of this amendment is to get the best advantage within the economic global circumstance for Alberta companies. What we have seen, for example, in the Fort McMurray area was division 8, where the first company in got to underbid all the other companies that were following in on a project. A good example of that is an outfit, CLAC, that poses as a union and then underbids everyone else.

What we're saying is that we want Alberta companies, unionized and non-unionized, to be a part of the rebuilding process for which the bond issues are directed. I apologize to members of this House that the wording appeared exclusionary. I understand that the way it's read. I appreciate your pointing that out. What we should have said is: give Alberta companies the opportunity to be considered in the bidding process, not have an advantage but a consideration. I fully understand where you're coming from, and I appreciate that contribution.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and answers. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for clarity and for the record I need clarification if the hon. member thinks that there have ever been jobs that the provincial government has put out for infrastructure that have excluded Alberta companies and not encouraged them to bid. Secondly, I wasn't clear on the end of the statements from the hon. member, but in the beginning I did hear that they should be limited to unionized companies and exclude all other Alberta companies and companies outside the boundaries. So just for clarification.

Mr. Chase: I'd be very pleased to clarify. I did not suggest that only unionized companies could bid. That would not be correct. I attempted to clarify that we're a global competitor and we need to be accepting bids from all companies.

With regard to: have Alberta companies ever been shut out of the bidding process? What has happened is that we have had great demand, for example, for electricians up in Fort McMurray, and we've had great demand for pipefitters, but because these individuals were unionized and because we had an apprentice system and an expectation of the journeymen supervising the apprentices and so on, the unionized Alberta employers were considered too expensive within the Alberta process, and therefore they were bypassed. At the height of the boom, particularly in Fort McMurray, there were a number of qualified, unionized individuals who were prevented from participating in the projects because less expensive foreign labour, non-unionized, undercut their ability to work in their own province.

We brought forward a number of plebiscites calling for the government to recognize and consider unemployed Albertans, First Nation Albertans, and farm-working Albertans for employment. These people were at the end of the line with cheap foreign labour, cheap partly because they didn't have any democratic rights to back up their ill treatment.

I hope I've provided that clarification. It's not just Alberta unionized individuals; it's not just Alberta individuals who should be able to bid on the projects. But working Albertans have been shut out in previous circumstances because the government was not willing to pay the standard contractual wage that had been provided for projects in Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. Just do a quick clarification, member, if you would, please, with respect to your comments about CLAC. Are you aware that CLAC is in fact recognized by the Alberta Labour Relations Board and that CLAC itself does not bid jobs? I'd just like you to explain to us, please, what it is you meant when you talked about them.

Thank you.

Mr. Chase: CLAC is known for their pretense of a union. CLAC is known for underbidding projects.

Mr. Elniski: They don't bid jobs.

Mr. Chase: They are part of the process for lowering the wages of working Albertans.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. May I seek additional clarification from the member with respect to how CLAC has in some way the ability to influence wage rates on construction projects?

Mr. Chase: That's what I was talking about with division 8. If CLAC is the first organization in, then according to Alberta labour laws, the first organization to reach a contract determines what the

contracts of subsequent contributors to a project involve. If CLAC says that they'll do it for this amount, every other project has to pay the amount that CLAC would get, with the limited benefits that CLAC members receive.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like the member to clarify if he understands what the Labour Relations Board is all about and how unions are certified in this province to bargain on sites.

The Acting Speaker: We're speaking to the amendment now. The time for questions and answers is over. We're speaking to the amendment, amendment A3.

If there are no others, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very interesting afternoon. Seeing that we are approaching 6 o'clock, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:49 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Centennial Window Unveiling	1599
Introduction of Visitors	1599
Introduction of Guests	1599
Members' Statements	
Excellence in Teaching Awards	1600
Public Consultation on Health Care	1600
Terra Centre Diaper Drive	1601
International Space Station Live Satellite Hookup	1609
Breast Cancer Awareness Month	1609
The Doorway Street Youth Transition Program	1609
Oral Question Period	
H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning	1601
Continuing Care for Seniors	1601
Long-term Care for Rural Seniors	1602
Nursing Shortage	1602
Calgary Rockyview Hospital Laser Equipment	1603
H1N1 Pandemic Ethics Framework	1603
Calgary High School Construction	1604
Home Moving Industry Regulation	1604
Reservists' Leave for Winter Olympics Service	1605
Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Services	1605
H1N1 Influenza Immunization for the Homeless	1606
Cattle Age Verification	1606
Horse-racing Industry	1607
Mountain Pine Beetle	1607
Education Funding	1608
Community Initiatives Program	1608
Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees	1610
Presenting Petitions	1610
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 209 Children's Services Review Committee Act	1610
Tabling Returns and Reports	1610
Tablings to the Clerk	1611
Government Motions	
Committee Membership Changes	1611
Alberta Capital Bonds	1611

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