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The 27th Legislature
Third Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
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 Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Treasury Board	Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education and Technology
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 9, 2010

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

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

Please be seated. Hon. members, before we proceed to the first order of business of the Routine, I would just like to advise hon. members that at 11:38 this morning I received a memo from our esteemed colleagues in the grouping of six, and tomorrow when you come in, there will be a revision to the manner in which the chairs are currently configured. That will be done for tomorrow, amicably, in harmony, together.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very enthusiastic class from St. Vincent elementary school. This class made their way from my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora to the Legislature today to take in a tour of the building and to witness the excitement of question period. I had a chance to chat with them and talk to them a little bit about the budget that is being presented today. I would like to thank the class for coming today, and I would ask the students as well as their teacher, Angela Whelan, and the class teaching assistants, Michelle Harper and Deb Morley, to all rise so they can receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly eight of Canada's finest. They are guests here today from Edmonton Garrison, which sits in my constituency. There are seven franco-phone soldiers and their teacher. They spend their time at the base learning English right now. They are Corporal Pierre Gregoire, Private Sylvain Morgan, Private Jonathan Michel, Private Anne Maltais, Private Mathieu Richard, Private Dominic Raymond, Private Caroline Garnier-Baril, and their teacher, Deborah Stasiuk. I'd ask them to please rise – I believe they're in the members' gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you 20 students from the Yellowhead Tribal College in the constituency of Edmonton-Calder and their teacher, Ms Linda Anderson. These young folks are here. They've completed all of their necessary course work at the Yellowhead Tribal College and are just in their final few days prior to graduation. I would ask them all now to stand and please receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: We have a very long list today, hon. members.
The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through to members of this Assembly two friends of mine who are sitting in the members' gallery, first being Mr. Joey Oberhoffner. Joey was born here in Edmonton, has lived in Calgary most of his life. He actually works for parks and protected areas with the government of Alberta and owns and operates a music school in Calgary. He also owns and operates a blog, enlightenedsavage.blogspot.com.

Mr. Speaker, the second individual is Janice Harrington. She is visiting for the budget today. She's the vice-president of communications and government relations for CGA Alberta. She is a resident of Airdrie, where she is the president of the Airdrie-Chestermere PC Association.

Mr. Speaker, I also noticed Jim Stevenson, alderman for ward 3, walk in.

I would ask that all members of this Assembly please rise and give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you two wonderful people from my constituency: Earl Marshall, the reeve for the county of Stettler, who has done amazing work in our area of looking after the folks out there – I'll always remember him for his efforts in getting safe water to the people throughout the area – and Tim Fox, the administrative officer for the county of Stettler, who we stole from Saskatchewan a number of years ago. He's a leader in sustainable communities and environmental design in public buildings. He's an amazing asset to our province. I'd ask them now to rise and receive the greetings of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce two constituents, the CEO of Nexen, Mr. Marvin Romanow, and the director of government relations, Mr. Brian Humphreys, who are here today to listen to the budget speech by our esteemed colleague. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two guests who are visiting the Legislature today, namely Matthew Bissett and Brendon Legault. Matthew and Brendon are from Sherwood Park, which is divided between my Strathcona constituency and the Sherwood Park constituency of the Hon. Iris Evans.

The Speaker: Uh-uh.

Mr. Quest: Yeah.

Matthew and Brendon are third-year political science students at Grant MacEwan University and have joined us previously in the House. They are here with especially keen interest as they anticipate today's budget speech, these two individuals and their academic skills and their passion for politics within our province. They are seated, I believe, in the members' gallery. I can't see them from

here. If they are here, I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two people that I consider to be very good friends, my best friends and confidants. First is Curtis McLauchlin. Curtis and I have been best friends probably since about the third grade. We used to live across the alley from each other in northeast Calgary. Curtis is currently a surface land manager at Imperial Oil on the Kearl project.

The other gentleman is Peter Davis. Peter and I have known each other for a while. He was the former executive assistant to former Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General Harvey Cenaiko and is now the assistant vice-president of government relations at Credit Union Central Alberta. These two individuals have had, whether it's envious or not so envious, the position of being my constituency presidents for the Calgary-North Hill PC Association for the last probably three years. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Tim Banman, a reporter for the *Bonnyville Nouvelle*. Tim arrived in Bonnyville five weeks ago from Brandon, Manitoba. I would ask that he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Welcome to Alberta, Tim.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have an introduction. I am very pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Cheryl Smith. Cheryl is from Camrose, and she is a member of the Battle River regional school division. She is the Camrose representative and also the board chair. It's her first time at question period, and I know she's very interested. She's in the members' gallery. She's also here for the budget speech, and I'm very happy to have her here. I'd ask that you and members of the Assembly give her a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour today to introduce to you and through you my executive assistant, Mr. Bryce Dudley. Mr. Bryce Dudley is a graduate of the University of Calgary political science department. He has brought a sense of clarity and vision to my office that I can only thank him for. It is really, indeed, welcome to have him every day when I walk into my office and see his bright and shining face and organization. The effort he puts into making my office work right is truly commendable. I would ask Mr. Dudley to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this august House.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Len Skowronski, the leader of the Alberta Social Credit Party. A functional democracy values a variety of views and voices; therefore, Len, would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you two friends that are seated in the members' gallery, Al and Kathy Kemmere. Al is the reeve of the county of Mountain View. They're up here today meeting with me and the Minister of Transportation, dealing with some local issues. Accompanying them earlier were Doug Plamping, the CEO for the county, and also Lana Yakimchuk, counsellor for division 2. Unfortunately, they had to go back to do some real work. Al and Kathy, fortunately, were able to stay here and join us for not only question period but the budget. I'd ask them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Lakeland 2010 Alberta Winter Games

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was an honour for my constituency to host the Lakeland 2010 Alberta Winter Games this past weekend. I first would like to thank the hon. the Premier and Mrs. Stelmach as well as the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation for attending the opening celebration and helping to kick off a wonderful weekend for many Albertans. The Winter Games is always such an exciting event in our province and a tremendous opportunity for athletes ages 11 to 17 to compete in events to achieve their personal bests. This event was particularly special for me this year because it gave all the participants an opportunity to experience Bonnyville-Cold Lake and see the many attractions that my community has to offer.

Approximately 2,400 athletes, coaches, and officials took part in over 20 competitive sports over the weekend. Some of the most memorable awards presented were the Alberta Cup, which was awarded to zone 3, Calgary, for achieving the most medal points over the weekend. The Alberta spirit and sports award, which is presented to the zone that demonstrates the spirit of fair play, sportsmanship, team spirit, and co-operation both on and off the field, was awarded to Edmonton, zone 6. Finally, the Minister's Cup was awarded to zone 7, my home, the Lakeland area, for the most improved from the last Alberta Winter Games.

I would like to thank everyone involved for helping to make this event such a tremendous success. It's incredible to see what can happen when communities come together. A big thanks to the over 2,800 volunteers from the town of Bonnyville, the municipal district of Bonnyville, and the city of Cold Lake plus 4 Wing as well as Lakeland catholic and Northern Lights school divisions for lending their facilities out to create the athletes' village for all those athletes. Without all of your help and support Lakeland 2010 Alberta Winter Games would not have been possible.

Thank you, everyone.

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

Safer Internet Day

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured and pleased to rise today to recognize Safer Internet Day. This internationally recognized day designated to promote safe and responsible use of online technology especially among children and youth is, in fact, today.

The Internet is a powerful tool, capable of connecting us to vast amounts of information and people around the globe. Unfortunately, this technology is also increasingly being used online by predators as a tool to lure and exploit children and youth. Children and youth today spend more time than ever before online, whether they are doing homework, playing games, updating their profiles on social networking sites, or chatting with friends. Despite their high level of knowledge about this technology many youth still engage in risky online behaviour such as posting photos and personal information, including their school and e-mail addresses, or accepting friend requests on Facebook from strangers. That is why it is so important for families, communities, and government to work together to ensure that our province's children and youth have the support they need to stay safe online.

Mr. Speaker, our government provides many resources to help educate about online dangers. Different online tools are available to parents, children, and teens through the Children and Youth Services website home page. I rise today not only to recognize this particular day and the importance of protecting children and youth online but also to encourage all Albertans to learn more about Safer Internet Day and reflect on what each of us can do to help children and youth remain safe as members of the world's online community.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

PDD Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great sense of loss that I note the recent passing of Darrell Cook, a very dedicated and vocal Calgary-based advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities.

Mr. Cook's dedication is indicative of the thousands of people in this province who care deeply for those with developmental disabilities, but many of those caregivers are contacting my office and the offices of the Official Opposition with grave concerns about this administration's approach to funding and care of people with developmental disabilities. With the amount of money wasted by the administration on grants to golf courses, foreign offices, travel, salary increases for MLAs and cabinet ministers, and bonuses for top Tory appointees and bureaucrats, it's very disconcerting for those involved that this government would actually ask the agencies that care for people to give back millions of dollars in the middle of a fiscal year.

To claw back money after it's been delivered is unfair, wrong, and shameful. We cannot balance the books off the backs of those least able to defend themselves. There are those who require help in our society, and what does it say about us when we marginalize them even further? Yes, we are in a recession, but we are still the wealthiest province in this country, and our future is better than most in the global community.

The Official Opposition has suggested a list of cuts that could help balance the books but not at the expense of vital programs and services. A dismissal of these suggestions out of hand is political, not governance. This government has not looked nearly hard enough for savings if they really believe PDD funding is the appropriate place to cut.

Governments and society are judged by how they treat their most vulnerable citizens. We need to do better, far better, to do the right thing and hope that one day we will have a favourable judgment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Samaritan Club of Calgary

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to recognize an exceptional Calgary organization that has worked tirelessly for a century to provide assistance to our less fortunate citizens.

I attended a van dedication to Calgary Meals on Wheels last month and had the opportunity to learn about the quiet evolution of a women's-only charity in Calgary called the Samaritan Club of Calgary, an organization created in 1910 by an extraordinary woman named Leonora Christine Woods. Initially named the Young Women's Benevolent Society, this organization's aim was to assist the hundreds of immigrants coming to live in Calgary, some of whom were very, very poor. While their name changed in 1916, their objectives did not, and they remained focused on helping families in need.

Today, with almost 200 members, this distinct Calgary-based Samaritan organization raises funds to address a wide range of needs in the community, including providing food vouchers, medications, dental procedures, and wheelchairs. In addition, the Samaritan Club of Calgary also donates to schools, hospitals, the Glenbow Museum, and the YWCA just to name a few.

The year 2010 marks this organization's 100th year of service to Calgary's less fortunate, and they have chosen to honour members both past and present through the donation of a delivery van to Calgary Meals on Wheels.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the amazing contributions that the Samaritan Club of Calgary has made to our great province. Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today this government is going to tell Albertans their services will be cut and they'll be saddled with multibillion-dollar debt. The consequences of being short-sighted with Alberta's finances are obvious to everyone except the members sitting across the aisle. While this government prays oil and gas prices will improve, the rest of us are still hoping to see a longer term plan. To the Premier: what longer term plan does the Premier have in place to pay back the billions of dollars in debt that this government has taken on over the last several years?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the government has not incurred any debt. We set aside a sustainability fund during the good years. We set aside some cash in reserve just for economic downturns like we're facing today. That's in the amount of \$17 billion. We also have another savings fund which was for our grandkids and their grandkids, which is the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and that is there for well, well into the future, when we run out of oil and gas in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Premier: what action has the Premier taken to lessen the impact of the boom-bust cycles that continue to wreak havoc on this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we set aside \$17 billion in a cash surplus fund to cushion the blow of the economic downturn. The economic downturn has created a huge global economic shift that most of the world is trying to work through. But I can tell you that with good fiscal planning on behalf of this government, we're going to be back in the black in three years, the first jurisdiction in Canada to do it.

Dr. Swann: Prayers again for oil and gas prices, Mr. Speaker.

How can the Premier justify the lack of action and the lack of leadership that has led Alberta again down this path that we said we would not take again?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the only jurisdiction in Canada and perhaps even in North America that has set aside a cash surplus fund to help cope with the rapid drop in revenue stream is this province. We will come out without any operational debt, meaning that for the surgeries that are done, for the children that we educate: all of that will be done with cash that we set aside in a reserve fund especially for situations like this.

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

Long-term Care Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 13 health care forums across Alberta Albertans told us they need more publicly funded, publicly delivered long-term care. Instead, this government is focused on providing for-profit designated assisted living. Alberta's fixed-income seniors don't deserve to be charged for needing an extra bath or extra housekeeping. They pay, and corporations skim off the profit. To the Premier. The Premier is quick to say that he supports a publicly funded health care system. Does the Premier support public tax dollars going to for-profit health care providers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think that today, once the budget is delivered, we will hear the minister deliver, I believe, the only long-term funding increase to health care in the country of Canada. That's a five-year commitment. That is part of good fiscal planning.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'll try it again, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier support public dollars going to private, for-profit health care providers? Yes or no?

Some Hon. Members: Like doctors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think you picked up that some of the people are saying that, well, doctors are private operators, but let's set that aside.

First of all, we have a goal in mind as the government, and that is to ensure that we provide accommodation – suitable accommodation, continuing care accommodation – for our seniors no matter where they live in the province of Alberta. Our goal here is to ensure that seniors can retire in the very same community that they helped build.

Dr. Swann: Well, yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Premier indicated that 800 continuing care beds would be available to seniors in the province. How many of these will be publicly funded and publicly delivered long-term care, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to at least 800. I believe the plan that the minister will roll out will get us beyond that

number. This is one area where we have to move very quickly. We have approximately 300 or so seniors in Edmonton and Calgary that are occupying acute-care beds. Hospitals are really not homes. We want to provide the appropriate care in an appropriate facility, and we will do that. Just wait for the budget this afternoon, and the minister will give all the details.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Competitiveness Review

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, while it's disappointing that this government is taking so long to catch up with the needs of the oil and gas industry, it is at least encouraging that the Minister of Energy has started reading our policy as he admitted in the House yesterday. Having read our policy, which was based on extensive consultation, the minister should know by now that the oil and gas industry needs certainty, quicker approval turnaround times, and well-thought-out royalties. To the Minister of Energy: when the minister finally gets around to releasing his competitiveness review, will he actually make the changes at that time, or is this just going to be yet another report?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we should be clear. The reason that I was familiar with the policy is because it had a striking resemblance to the policy of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. In fact, I think they xeroxed the Petroleum Producers' presentation. We will, as I said yesterday, be releasing the competitiveness review in due course, and we'd be happy to discuss it in this Assembly.

Mr. Taylor: Just not now, apparently.

Mr. Speaker, by the time this minister does anything, it will be the fifth or sixth royalty tweak in the last two and a half years. Investors no longer trust that the rules this month in Alberta are going to be the rules next month, so how long can the industry expect this latest system to last?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about royalty tweaks. What we're talking about is a competitiveness review. It's a review that's going to take into account all of the elements that business and the oil and gas industry have to consider when investing in this province. This particular review is going to be about one thing only, and that's going to be about jobs for Albertans. We're going to ensure that this is the most competitive environment so that Albertans are working in the oil patch.

Mr. Taylor: And 78,000 unemployed Albertans wait and wait and wait.

One of the policies we know right now should be implemented is a simplified one-window approach to speed up applications. When will the minister bring in a one-window approach?

Mr. Liepert: Stay tuned.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Because of this government's policies Albertans pay more than other Canadians for child care, health care, education, and home utilities. According to Statistics Canada Alberta households pay out of pocket the second

highest amount for utilities, the third highest for child care, the second highest for education, and the highest amount for health care. My question is to the Premier. While corporations and the wealthiest Albertans have done extremely well by this government, ordinary families are paying more. What, if anything, is this Premier going to do to help ordinary families in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have the lowest overall taxes in the country of Canada. We also have the highest exemption compared to other provinces for families. That means that the first, I believe, roughly \$34,000 of taxable income is exempted in Alberta compared to other provinces. With respect to the one province that the hon. member is referring to, and that is the province of Quebec, I would say that it's a contribution from Albertans, the \$21.1 billion that we sent to Ottawa last year to subsidize them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, he dodges, but he can't hide.

Alberta has the most deregulated and privatized utility sector in Canada. [some applause] It should be no surprise, then, that Alberta families spend on average over \$3,000 a year on utilities. This is 33 per cent higher than the national average, and the members opposite are applauding it. To the Premier: will he admit that his deregulation policies have led to higher costs for Alberta families, and if not, will he explain why they are so high?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if you look at the last couple of months – I don't know how far back we have to go – we've had some of the lowest wholesale electricity rates in the country of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. He just deals with part of the problem and doesn't answer the questions.

The average Alberta family spends more on school fees, supplies, and postsecondary tuition than in any other province except Ontario. Postsecondary education was supposed to be affordable, and primary and secondary was supposed to be free, yet education costs are now a major burden on Alberta families. Will the Premier tell the Assembly what steps he's going to take to reduce the costs of education in the household budgets of Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. One, going back to the first question, I think the hon. member has to also look at all of the other fees that are attached by others that are providing electricity, water, and other services to the houses. Most of those are franchise fees that are set by municipalities, have nothing to do with the province of Alberta.

The other issue is that here we have the best postsecondary system in all of the country of Canada. Seventy per cent of the cost of public postsecondary education is covered by the provincial global taxpayer.

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

2:00

Health Legislation

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are very aware of the recommendations that our government recently accepted from the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health. One of the main recommendations is for Alberta to have our very own

Alberta health care act. This is probably a good idea, but I have a few questions for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why are you bringing in a provincial health act when we already have a Canada Health Act? Isn't that a duplication of effort, especially when our report supports the Canada Health Act?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe it's a duplication of effort at all. Albertans have told us rather resoundingly that they want their own health care act that specifies issues and principles based around Alberta themes, and they're going to get that. They've also said that they want an Alberta health care act that enshrines the Canada Health Act principles of accountability, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and public administration, and that's what we're going to deliver.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. How will an Alberta health act improve our health service delivery system? Is this sort of an exercise in public relations?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, some people might refer to it as an exercise in public relations when you're consulting with key stakeholders and when you're communicating with Albertans, when you're engaging them in the discussion. I refer to it as my job, and I'm very proud to have this job to help out. I know that when we look at what the principles will be that underline our own Alberta health care act, they will enshrine the Canada Health Act principles that I already mentioned. It will identify key responsibilities that we all have as Albertans, and it will also look at consolidating different acts so that people can have a one-stop shopping centre to go to read and understand what's going on in health care in a much clearer way than today.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, if this is so important, why is it taking so long to get one?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the short answer would be that I don't recall a report, at least a formal report, wherein anyone ever advocated for our having our own Alberta health care act. But they have now through a committee co-chaired by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and they have said: we want our own act; we want it to reflect what the Alberta principles are, what the Alberta experiences are. In many ways we're so far ahead of so many other jurisdictions. They want us to reflect that from Alberta's perspective, and we will.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Air Quality Monitoring

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton recently had two heavy smog days, but you'd have to look long and hard to get specific information or, in fact, any information. The national air monitoring system would have allowed Albertans to immediately check air quality by turning on their televisions. To the Minister of Environment: why cut Alberta out of the benefit of being onboard with the full national program?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we've been studying very intently the national program, and we have determined that it does not serve the needs of Alberta. It does not measure some of the key air contami-

nants that we believe are important to Albertans, and for that reason Alberta maintains its own separate air monitoring system. I should point out, though, that I think it is a shortcoming that we don't have the same accessibility, and I can assure the member that that's one of the priorities that we will be addressing in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister: well, how can a monitoring system like Alberta's, that doesn't report cumulative effects, give Albertans an honest picture of what's going on?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what cumulative effects the member is referring to, but what I will accept is that the monitoring system that we have in place here doesn't talk about particulates. So I think that's a real shortcoming. We are reporting that we have good air quality, and the average Albertan can either look outside or step outside and smell smoke from the forest fires or experience the results of an inversion. That is a shortcoming, and that's something that we are committed to addressing, and we will address it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The minister is exactly right. But a number of people can't step outside. In fact, they can't step outside, and they need to be able to look at something to know whether it's even healthy for them to step outside. So why would we have a monitoring system that people don't know about? How cost-effective is that?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's not quite that extreme. We do have accessibility to our monitoring system. What I'm saying is that we need to do a better job when we're talking about having a web-based system that the public can access and, frankly, that the media would be able to access as well and provide for that additional source of information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Fish Consumption Advisory Guidelines

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a fish consumer. My people are fish consumers. At the recent Waterkeeper Alliance fundraiser in Banff and in subsequent media reports comments were made that Alberta's fish are not edible, and that has caused many of my people to be worried, creating uncertainty about fish as a food source. Therefore, my question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What are you doing to ensure that Alberta's fish are safe to eat for me, my people, and anybody who wants to enjoy Alberta's fish?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, Alberta Health and Wellness base their advisories with respect to fish consumption on guidelines from Health Canada, and SRD, my ministry, communicates these advisories on an annual basis and even during the year through our fishing guidebook. Fishing is a big business in Alberta. It's over a \$400 million business in the sport-fishing industry and about 3 and a half million dollars in commercial fishing. By the

way, about 2 million kilograms of whitefish, on average, have been netted from the province of Alberta and sold internationally. They meet all of the guidelines required.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, if that's in fact true – I'd like my first supplemental question to go to the Minister of Health and Wellness – can he then tell us how many of Alberta's water bodies have fish consumption advisories? This kind of information is really important to those fishermen as well as to the people who eat it.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, we have between 2,000 and 3,000 water bodies in the province of Alberta, and for those 2,600 or so water bodies we have about eight advisories that have been issued by the chief medical officer. We're concerned about those eight, obviously, but we have to keep in mind that most of the mercury accumulation that occurs in those water bodies tends to happen from natural sources such as rotting trees or wildfires and the like. Nonetheless, it's a serious issue, and we are looking deeper into it.

Ms Calahasen: Well, eight is really great.

Words are one thing, Mr. Speaker, but actions are what count to my people. So what is the Department of Sustainable Resource Development doing to support fish testing activities, and if they are not doing what they should be doing, will the minister make a commitment to joining me and my constituents in fishing the waters in question and then eating the fish that we do, smoked fish?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, water bodies in the province of Alberta are tested for mercury in fish at any point in time when there's a perceived risk. It can be a natural risk that could take place by occurrences, something like wildfire. We also conduct periodic studies and get information from local and regional programs and industry players. So my department does help to collect fish samples, and we are testing fish whenever asked. Also, the department has a multistakeholder group, a regional aquatics monitoring program, and we work with them to make sure that Alberta fish are safe for consumers.

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

Teachers' Salary Arbitration

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday a provincial arbitrator finally resolved an ongoing dispute over the correct wage increase teachers should be given this year. However, the fact that we are still dealing with this issue almost a year later is symbolic of this government's inept management of our public education system. To the Minister of Education: why did the minister choose to leave school boards in the lurch yet again by not setting aside a contingency fund in this year's budget in the event that the province lost an arbitration?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the preamble leaves things that need to be answered. Inept management? All around the world people are looking at Alberta as having an education system that is among the best in the world. Even at a conference this week in Edmonton I understand that education was held out as one of the areas that government is succeeding in. So I don't know where this hon. member comes from with statements like that about inept management.

The long and short of it is that if he understands labour relations processes, he understands that when you have a disagreement with respect to the interpretation of a clause of a contract, you put it into an arbitration process or some other governance process to deal with it, which is what we did and got it resolved relatively quickly.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A result, I would add, that this government has ignored.

Statistics Canada reported that it would change the formula used for wage increases in December 2008, but when the change occurred in March of the next year, the ministry was caught flat-footed. Considering the tens of million of dollars involved, why wasn't the minister monitoring the situation?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there were discussions, apparently, about what StatsCan might be doing with its formula, but up until the end of February of last year the published number was 4.82, which is the number we very prudently used in planning our budget. The fact is that they came out at the end of March with a larger number without any notice to us other than prior to the middle of March, when the first inkling came out that there was going to be a new calculation, a new number. That is not something that a person would guess at and speculate on, so we did the prudent thing, and we budgeted on what was known.

Mr. Chase: Well, I would suggest that there's a tremendous lack of foresight in that statement as well as in your general dealings.

If the province had initiated arbitration immediately, a decision may have been reached in time for this year's budget. Why did the minister dither until August of 2009 before announcing that he would not honour the wage increase figure supported by the teachers? It's your arbitrator.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we've never ever said that we would not honour the contract at all. In fact, it's a contract between school boards and local ATAs. We have never said that we would not honour the contract. We said that there was a difference of interpretation with respect to a clause in the contract in terms of how to calculate the adjustment. That's not an abnormal circumstance. Contracts provide for how to deal with those issues. This contract provided for how to deal with that issue. We used the terms of the contract to deal with the issue in exactly the way that it was intended, and it's been done, as I say, in accordance with labour relations processes in a very timely manner. In fact, it's probably the fastest arbitration decision in the history of labour relations.

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

Bioenergy Initiatives

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pine beetle has created some real challenges in this province, especially in my constituency of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and in many other forest communities around the province. But at the same time it has also created some opportunities. My questions are all to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Your previous portfolio in Energy and now your existing portfolio in Sustainable Resources give you a great opportunity to promote bioenergy fuels. How come you're not knocking on my doors, and how come you're not

knocking on industry's doors to tell us about the great nine-point plan that the Alberta government has?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest, perhaps, that the member opposite has a short memory because we've knocked on all the doors. Nevertheless, what's happening in the department now, in SRD: we are working with all of the producers in the province, particularly the major producers with large FMAs that are experiencing difficulty relative to the mountain pine beetle.

Mr. Speaker, there are tremendous opportunities in the province of Alberta in bioenergy and even in petrochemicals and fuels relative to the fibre business. We'll continue to work with industry. They're in the game with us. We're working with them. We believe there are some wins on all sides here.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, that's a good answer, Mr. Minister.

Again back to you. It seems like there's a lot of red tape to get through the granting programs and through the nine-point bioenergy plan that we have. What are you doing to streamline this process so that we can get to work and take advantage of this fibre source that we have here today?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, you know, when we put out these types of initiatives and when we're using public money – let's remember that my colleague has about \$239 million that we have earmarked to invest in these particular types of programs, not just with fibre but a number of other initiatives as well. We need to be prudent that where we apply public dollars, there is the best possible chance of a positive outcome.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, since you mentioned your colleague, I'll supplement this to the Minister of Energy. Will you commit, Mr. Minister, to working with the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and the communities that are so dependent on the forest industry to get this bioenergy plan going now?

Mr. Liepert: Well, one of the difficulties we're having right now – and this is what we're attempting to work through in the near weeks – is that it's not so much to get the program going; it's a question of an uneconomic situation over the last couple of years. We need to look at the potential of extending the particular program because there are a number of projects out there. Many of them are tied to federal dollars. Again, as my colleague said, it has to make economic sense, and that's what we're trying to work out.

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

Alberta Health Services Board

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shortly after he was appointed, the Minister of Health and Wellness stated that his ministerial style was, and I quote, that he's always been hands on. That was what he said. Then within days of becoming minister, he completely changed a number of major decisions made by Alberta Health Services. Just when it didn't seem possible, there's even more confusion than ever within Alberta Health Services. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: as a hands-on minister is he running Alberta Health Services or is Ken Hughes and their board and staff?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, let's understand the body. This body has two arms. The body is called Alberta Health and Wellness, and the ministry is called the Alberta Health and Wellness ministry. One arm is the delivery arm, and that is Alberta Health Services. It is very competently run by a gentleman named Mr. Ken Hughes, and he is doing an outstanding job. That arm reports to this body. The other arm is the Alberta Health and Wellness department. That arm also is connected to and reports to this body.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. I appreciate the minister's anatomically correct explanation. Let's see if this body has a head, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister clarify whether it was his decision, the Premier's, Ken Hughes's, or Stephen Duckett's to keep the 290 acute-care beds open in Calgary and Edmonton? Whose decision?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it was a joint decision, not quite involving all the parties that he mentioned but most certainly involving direction from the Premier overall to improve the health care system. For the Health Services folks to have found some efficiencies that allowed us to make some of those improvements so quickly, I'm grateful, but I did connect with them prior to making any comments on it. I hope you will agree that it's important to keep those 300 acute-care beds open in Edmonton and Calgary. That's what we're trying so hard to do, and we will.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the same minister: will the minister tell the Assembly whether the CEO and board of Alberta Health Services clear all their major policy decisions with himself before those decisions are enacted?

Mr. Zwozdesky: No, Mr. Speaker. They're not required to, but I think there would be occasions when they may wish to at least speak with me about what policy decisions they're taking.

The reason that we appointed one province-wide board is so that we could take a look at the width and breadth of health care and health care costs and health care services so that we could make the improvements necessary. I hope that when the member sees the budget and the business plan coming out, the five-year guaranteed funding plan, a first of its kind, to my knowledge, anywhere in the country, will in fact do that.

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

Carbon Capture and Storage

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By its actions this government has hurt the Alberta energy workers and industry and injured our reputation as a reliable place to invest. This government doesn't understand that consumers and taxpayers are tired of paying for their failed policies. The Environment minister has openly talked about tripling the price of the carbon levy, from \$15 a tonne to \$45 a tonne. My question is for the minister. What would a \$45 tax levy add to the price of Albertans' average home heating bill?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the member fails to recognize are two things. First of all, the price of energy, oil and gas, is established on the world market. This industry are price takers, not

price makers. So the short answer is that it wouldn't impact. The longer answer is that of course it would, but it would impact Alberta homeowners in the same way it would impact homeowners anywhere else in the world. We've also said, which the member failed to point out, that we're not prepared to take an action until the rest of the world steps along with us.

Mr. Hinman: He's talking about it, and they'll end up doing it, but what he fails on, as I asked, is what it would add to the bill. Albertans understand what the cost of the commodity is.

Mr. Speaker, this government's approach on the big issue is to delay, not actually solve the problem. If we look at carbon sequestration, their approach is to bury billions of dollars of taxpayers' money in the ground, cross their fingers, and hope that it gets them out of trouble. Well, it won't work. Does the Environment minister agree with his blue-ribbon panel that the government would need to spend \$24 billion on this dead-end carbon capture and storage plan?

2:20

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think what this member is saying, only he doesn't have the courage to state it, is that he doesn't believe that we need to be dealing with climate change. The fact of the matter is that the world is struggling right now to deal with this issue called climate change. There will be costs associated. No one has ever said that there would not be costs associated. Alberta and Canada need to be part of the decision-making process that determines how we as a collective society around the world deal with this very, very critical issue of climate change.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, he didn't even answer the question about his own blue-ribbon panel and be honest with Albertans on what that would cost and wait for the member's statement before he makes such a judgment. If the Environment minister does or doesn't agree with his panel and the cost, why won't he come through and tell the cost to Albertans? The question is: will the minister do the right thing and put on a world-class forum that only accepts scientific, peer-reviewed reports to find the facts for Albertans?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the cost of carbon capture and storage is enormous because it doesn't apply just in Alberta; it applies in Canada, in the United States, and throughout the world. That is the very issue that we are struggling with right now, and when I say we, I mean collective mankind. This is transformational technology. It's like any new technology. Everyone expects that over time the price will come down. But make no mistake; there are costs associated with it. This government is prepared to lead by example and demonstrate how we can apply technology to address this critical issue.

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

Hail Insurance

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency office has received a number of calls recently about a recent decision by the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation board that will change the way our producers purchase hail insurance. As a result, farmers can purchase the hail insurance product online or, in the case of my constituency, travel on average about a hundred kilometres to a district office. Two problems: district offices are not located in many rural communities in Alberta, and secondly, the online portals

are not readily available to all parts of the province. My question is to the minister of agriculture. Minister, I'd like to know just how much consultation there was involving our agricultural agents of hail insurance that took place before the decision was made.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have definitely been changes made to the way producers can purchase their hail insurance. We have expanded the service and the options available to those producers, and we did it after receiving information from a steering group of Alberta farmers. In addition to the hail insurance available through their local agent, they now will have 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week availability online. This year that information will be filed with their other crop insurance information through the online option.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks. The first supplemental that I have, then, to the same minister: will this decision be reviewed so that, actually, the best service and choice and practices that are available to the farmers are considered a priority before you implement the change?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The input has already been reviewed. People have come back and made comment on our direction. Our producers are always, of course, of the highest interest to us as we expand services across the province. In addition to the online and their local agent, they also have the availability of those 52 AFSC offices across the province that can take care of their insurance needs.

Mr. McFarland: My final supplemental to the same minister: how will AFSC's decision improve rural community viability for businesses if the businesses aren't there to offer their service?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, the service will be available through those agents at the local level, as it always has been. My expectation, though, is that with the online options available to producers, there will be a number of them that will take advantage of that. It's going to be the market that decides what the viable option is with respect to insurance. All options will still be available to those producers, and hopefully this works very well for them.

Peace and Police Officer Training Centre

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, in 2004 this government announced it would be building the Alberta police college in Fort Macleod. At that time the government indicated that it was necessary to build this complex in order to ensure that a well-trained police force was present in Alberta. To date the project has not been built. I assume there must be a reason for this. My question is to the Solicitor General. Does the government still believe that the building of an Alberta police college is necessary to improve the delivery of law enforcement services in this province, or can we get by with the status quo?

Mr. Oberle: Thank you for the question. As the member correctly points out, we have not built the college in Fort Macleod. We're reviewing the financial situation at the moment. As members

opposite have pointed out, we are in fiscal difficulties right now. I'm reviewing the situation and will report back to this House when I'm ready.

Mr. Hehr: Well, it sounds like we still sort of need a site; we're just not sure when. That's, I guess, fair. Is Fort Macleod, then, still the preferred site for this training centre?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member just made a bunch of assumptions that I never gave him in the first question, so I can't really address it. I didn't say that we absolutely needed it, nor did I say that we're looking at Fort Macleod or any other centre. I said that I would report back to this House when I'm ready to do so.

Mr. Hehr: Well, let me back up the bus. In 2004 I thought we were clear: you guys announced you were building a training centre. Is that on or off the table? Can you confirm to this community whether you are going to be building it and quit jerking around, then?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, might I refer the hon. member to answer 1(a).

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

Canadian Access to U.S. Procurement Market

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our federal government has recently come to an agreement with the American federal government to address protectionist measures in the U.S. Recovery Act that previously discriminated against Canadian business. My question to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations: what impact does this agreement have on Alberta businesses?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this is a very good first step. Let's back up a bit and recognize, especially during the recession, that businesses on both sides of the border needed to have some degree of confidence that the senior levels of governments were going to work in harmony and be able to work together to resolve issues. The Canadian government, acting through negotiations with America, tapped in on the resources in each one of the provinces because we're responsible for implementation of agreements and understood that participation of the provinces was essential in defining what we would have as a strategy. So \$6 billion was available . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question, then, to the same minister. Access to \$6 billion worth of procurement contracts isn't that much considering that Alberta exported an estimated \$96.6 billion to the U.S. in 2008. Can the minister please explain what use this agreement is to us if they only allow us to access \$6 billion worth of contracts?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it sets the stage in the right direction so that companies in Canada, companies in Alberta will have a chance at the U.S. major procurement opportunities. It's a good first step, and we believe at this stage it's a positive sign, moving in the right direction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question to the same minister. Our federal government has indicated there are provincial and territorial commitments in the new agreement that may affect our procurement system. Can the minister explain how this will affect Alberta's procurement system?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have already advanced in our procurement system well beyond what this agreement implies. We have a very open and transparent procurement system with the TILMA agreement and the kinds of work we've been doing to take down the barriers to open ourselves and our borders for this kind of responsible trade. We are already in Alberta well positioned. Many other jurisdictions may not be as well positioned, but Alberta is in good shape.

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

Deerfoot Trail

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are already hearing about cuts to the municipal sustainability initiative, and now we hear about the province wanting to return the Deerfoot back to the city of Calgary. This is another example of this government downloading costs at a time when resources are being cut. To the Minister of Transportation. My constituents want to know: is the minister planning to return the Deerfoot back to the city of Calgary?

2:30

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I think there was a big misunderstanding here by someone when this first came up and was talked about. As everyone knows, the policy of this government is that any time we build a ring road around a city or a bypass to any town or city in Alberta, when that road is completely done and we have a new highway and then we have a highway that's not needed anymore, we sit down and negotiate with that municipality on returning it to them in the very highest possible form that we can, and we take it from there. We haven't got that new highway around the city of Calgary yet, so it's a long way off before we're actually in the process of trying to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm asking the minister just to clarify things.

To the minister again: given that returning the highway to Calgary wasn't part of the original agreement, is the minister doing this to download the cost to Calgary?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just said that it's a policy of this government that we always sit down and negotiate. We don't force anything onto anybody. We sit down and negotiate when – when – we have the proper highway that all Albertans need to get around the city.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Deerfoot Trail is still the highway. It will remain the highway.

To the minister again. Maintenance of the Deerfoot costs around \$8 million a year. Will the minister commit to funding the ongoing maintenance costs of the Deerfoot if it's handed over to the city?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I already committed to him that we look after our provincial highways, and as long as that's a provincial

highway, we will do a very good job of maintaining it to keep Calgarians and Albertans safe on our highways in Alberta.

High-speed Rail Link

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary to Edmonton corridor is incredibly busy. According to an Alberta Transportation study in 2006 nearly 10 million trips were taken in this corridor, and since the study numbers have continued to rise. High-speed rail has been raised as an option to reduce traffic on the Queen Elizabeth II highway, reducing congestion, shortening the travel time, and reducing emissions. All of my questions are for the Minister of Transportation. In view of the market demand assessment released last July, can the minister advise whether the government will support a high-speed rail link between Calgary and Edmonton?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the market demand assessment was a very, very good step towards high-speed rail in Alberta. That said, that report makes no recommendations regarding future government involvement in such a project. We know that planning for the future and having an innovative transportation system is important, and we will continue to look at all options to support Albertans and the province's economic future. However, the report does say that high-speed rail . . .

The Speaker: Maybe we'll come to it.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, given the fast growth and the increased intensity of land use in the Calgary-Edmonton corridor, it would seem to make sense to acquire the land for a future right-of-way. Will the minister advise whether or not he's prepared to move in the direction of acquiring the land for such a right-of-way?

Mr. Ouellette: Real quick, to finish my last answer, the report also does say that with the amount of people moving into Alberta, even if we had that, we will need to put that extra lane on the QE II.

Mr. Speaker, if all of my colleagues decide to say, "Let's proceed with the corridor study," we would have to do that to determine that alignment. The study would take about two years to complete . . .

The Speaker: And we may come back again.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, would the minister be prepared to consider a public-private partnership agreement to move that high-speed rail project forward?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we will look at all options to do the very best deal we can for Albertans and Alberta taxpayers. The Calgary-Edmonton corridor has been described as an economic tiger to this province. We know that it's an important component for all of our transportation network in the province. The government supports the use of P3s. We always support whatever is the best deal for our taxpayers in this province, and P3s have proven to be part of that, but we will look at various numbers of options. If the deal isn't good enough for private enterprise, it probably isn't good enough for Alberta taxpayers either.

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

Minimum Wage

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's move to freeze the minimum wage will by its own admission impact 20,000 of Alberta's most vulnerable, grabbing an expected \$240 per year out of their pockets and giving it back to their employer. Only this

government would be so out of touch to think that the best way to create jobs is on the backs of the very poorest people in this province. Will the minister admit that not only is it wrong but that this callous decision denies minimum wage earners money that they desperately need?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, only this government would make sure that Albertans who are in a position where they are earning minimum wage, who are the most vulnerable to being laid off because of their circumstances of either a lack of transferable skills or being employed in a very volatile section of our economy, would now, at a time when our Alberta economy is most fragile, increase the minimum wage and put them on social assistance, put that welfare wall in front of them and have them dependent on social assistance. I will focus on keeping them employed, and that's what we will do.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, copious studies show that the notion of fair minimum wage levels leading to job loss is pure fiction. The sad truth is that minimum wage earners don't earn enough to do anything other than pour their money back into their local economy. Their dollars are the best at creating jobs. Why won't the minister stop being such a miser and give minimum wage workers the 12-cent raise they were promised?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. In Alberta there are roughly 20,000 Albertans who are working at minimum wage. Of that 20,000, more than 50 per cent are individuals who are working in an industry where there are tips and gratuities included. We can't account for how much they're making in addition to that. The fact of the matter is that I have spoken with restaurant owners. They would end up laying off low-income earners if that cost was added onto their bottom line. My preference is to keep them working, to find a more effective formula and have them staying employed.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, two-thirds of minimum wage earners are women, many of whom are single parents, and we know that there is a huge linkage between low minimum wage and child poverty. In this context this government has just grabbed 20 bucks a month out of their pockets. Twenty bucks a month won't bankrupt a business, but it will mean less food on their tables. Why is the minister doing petty favours for industry by picking pennies out of the pockets of low-income Albertans?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, let's be honest here. This government has not grabbed any money out of anybody's pockets. What this government has done is made sure that they stayed employed. Let's be frank. If those individuals who are employed right now were laid off, they would be receiving low-income benefits, which are significantly lower than what they are earning right now. The fact of the matter is that since this member is so very passionate, I will be asking an all-party committee to take a look at the whole structure of minimum wage, find out what is fair once and for all for Albertans, and then I will more than welcome gathering that kind of input. Thank you.

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

Government Spending

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government likes to talk about working for all Albertans and taking care of their priorities. When the Premier announced his new cabinet, he also added a Political Minister for Calgary and a Political Minister for

Edmonton. My question is to the Deputy Premier. If the work of these political ministers is so valuable and so needed, why didn't he name a political minister for rural Alberta or the larger cities, like Fort McMurray or Red Deer, that exist across this province?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously Edmonton and Calgary, the two larger centres in the province, contain roughly two-thirds of the province's population. There are a number of issues that are being worked on in both of those cities, and it's a prudent move to have one place for those cities, those municipalities to have a contact. I also point out that we have a chair of Calgary caucus, we have a chair of Edmonton caucus, we have a chair of the rural caucus, and we have representations to all of those committees. This is simply a political move on the other party's part to try to take away representation from those two cities.

2:40

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, we have 83 MLAs elected that are supposed to be representing their constituents.

The government also likes to stand up and say that it is fighting for Albertans and working on their priorities. In 2004-2005 the Executive Council office cost taxpayers about \$2.1 million. In 2008-2009 the same office cost taxpayers about \$4 million. That is an 84 per cent increase in the size of the Executive Council office budget. Mr. Speaker, my question again is to the Deputy Premier.

The Speaker: Okay. Deputy Premier, go ahead.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously we're going to have a fair bit of time here in the next little while to debate the budget. We're going to be debating the estimates. In fact, today, obviously, the Minister of Finance and Enterprise is going to be presenting the budget, which is going to show that this government has listened to Albertans. This government is going to do what Albertans want us to do based on their priorities, not their priorities.

Mrs. Forsyth: That's nice to hear, Mr. Speaker. I'll look forward to a decrease in Executive Council's budget.

Mr. Speaker, the previous Premier didn't need as many advisers. Perhaps if the government had a vision that Albertans knew about, then they wouldn't be so troubled right now. My question is to the Deputy Premier. If extra staff and salary are so essential to do the job, where is the accountability, and why aren't Albertans getting better results?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard the question, but I guess I'm struggling with the idea of extra staff because we haven't actually had the budget yet. I'm sure the hon. member will have plenty of time to discuss the budget in the estimates, which is her right as a private member in this House. I look forward to her participating in the debate in the many hours that we'll be going through that debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today 18 individual members were recognized. The Official Opposition had eight questions, the two independent parties had two each, and the government caucus had six. There were 108 questions and answers.

We'll continue with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well over 500 caregivers, professionals, family members, and service providers are attending the sixth annual Alberta Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Conference in Calgary this week. They are learning more about how to prevent, treat, and support people living with FASD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It's an issue that I take very seriously as I saw the deep and wide-ranging effects first-hand during my time as AADAC chair a few years ago.

It may come as a shock for many to learn that over 23,000 Albertans have FASD, and the social and economic impacts of the disorder touch every single one of us. That's why our Alberta government is continuing to fund community-based supports, research, and education and awareness programs throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that a cross-ministry team of no fewer than nine ministries has brought its best people together to give those with FASD all-encompassing supports. With the guidance of a 10-year strategic plan we're seeing great results, such as the 12 FASD service networks, which help people living with FASD to reach their full potential in their communities. We're also seeing the number of FASD assessment and diagnostic clinics rise. Alberta now has 20 clinics, twice as many as we had in 2008. We're also focusing on providing caregivers and professionals the training needed to further support people with FASD and utilizing mentors who are helping expectant at-risk mothers to live healthy lifestyles during pregnancy.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that there are many incredibly inspirational people who are dedicated to helping the most vulnerable children and their families. I encourage every Albertan to learn more about the role they can play in assisting all in our communities who are affected by this preventable disability.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government Spending

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in December Albertans watched as activists and politicians flew in their private jets to Copenhagen. We were even able to witness their fleets of luxury cars driving people to cocktail receptions, invite-only meetings, and celebrity events.

While in Copenhagen Alberta's Environment minister made some comments that were very concerning to Albertans. When asked about the price of carbon credits, the Environment minister told reporters that he did not believe that \$15 per tonne was enough and that the cost should be double or even higher.

Over the past year it has become clear that much more research must be done on whether or not and to what extent man-made carbon dioxide is affecting our planet. Mr. Speaker, you'll be pleased to know that I support this research taking place because we need answers that strip away the hype and give us the facts. Without facts we cannot make informed decisions. Without facts we cannot figure out what the best solutions are for any other issues as well. But at this point to invest billions of taxpayers' dollars without the full picture is just wrong.

Mr. Speaker, this government has undermined investors' confidence as a result of its blatant disregard for contracts and its disastrous royalties scheme. It talks out of both sides of its mouth on many issues. If we take the Environment minister at his word, he wants to pile even more costs on Alberta industries, all industries that operate here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this government is addicted to spending. We need an intervention on behalf of hard-working Alberta taxpayers and businesses so that they can be protected from this government's ever-increasing shakedown to support their spending habit. The first step to recovery is to acknowledge that one has a problem. The second step is to apologize to those that you have hurt. The third step is to do all you can to make it right. This government has failed on the first two steps. We need a government that can actually get it right.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a constituent of mine, Dustin McNichol. He writes to express his concern with "the University of Alberta's recent decision to levy a new non-instructional, mandatory fee of \$570 in order to make up for budgetary shortfalls."

The second, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a document from the Parkland Institute, which uses Statistics Canada data to show that Albertans pay more out of pocket for child care, health care, education, and utilities than Canadians in other provinces.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm tabling today the appropriate copies of letters, one dated January 27, 2010, from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs advising me of his resignation from three different standing committees; a letter dated February 1, 2010, from the Member for Calgary-Egmont advising me of his resignation from three different committees; and a letter dated February 8, 2010, from the hon. Member for Peace River advising me of his resignation from two standing committees of the House.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, Budget 2009 third-quarter fiscal update 2009-2010.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, Advanced Education and Technology public postsecondary institutions audited financial statements, universities and the Banff Centre, for the year ended March 31, 2009.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as it is budget day there is a requirement for us to do a few little modifications in the Assembly prior to us coming back, so I'm now going to declare a recess of the House. We will reconvene at 3:15 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:48 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I read his message, I would like you to pass on to him what a tremendous honour and privilege it has been for everyone in this Assembly to work with the Hon. Norman Kwong over the past few years. [applause]

Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Rise in the galleries.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

As well, the Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Government Motions

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving Government Motion 4, I wish to table the 2010-11 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2010-11 government estimates. Also being tabled for the information of the Legislative Assembly are business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of the Government Accountability Act. In addition, the Government Accountability Act requires that the government at the same time table the government's business plan and the consolidated fiscal and capital plans. The hon. Premier will table the government's strategic business plan, and the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise will table the consolidated fiscal and capital plans.

4. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2010-11 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply and that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2010-11 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply following consideration by the policy field committees.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the government of Alberta strategic business plan as required under section 7 of the Government Accountability Act. The strategic business plan sets out the government's vision. It sets out the long-term strategic plan. It also includes the government's three-year business plan, which outlines the government's goals, strategies, and measures necessary to track results over the next three years.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table two documents at this time. First, I wish to table the government's consolidated fiscal and capital plans for Budget 2010. The consolidated fiscal plan is required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act, and the consolidated capital plan is required under section 7.1 of the same act.

Second, I wish to table the government's heritage savings trust fund business plan. The business plan is required under section 7 of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act.

3:20

Budget Address

5. Dr. Morton moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege today to present the government of Alberta's proposed budget for the fiscal year 2010-11. I do so with confidence but also with caution, caution because our province and, indeed, our country and the world are all still feeling the impact of the worst economic recession since the 1930s – these are difficult times, and difficult times call for difficult choices – but also with confidence because these choices are made easier and the path to a brighter future made more certain by knowing that this Assembly and this government can draw upon the many strengths that are Alberta's heritage.

Alberta's heritage is one of strong families and strong communities, of independence and self-reliance but also a spirit of caring for our neighbours. We value our past and provide for the future. We respect and support those generations that built Alberta, and we are proud to act as stewards of our natural and economic resources, responsible for passing on to the next generation an Alberta that is as good as or better than the one we received. Budget 2010 is faithful to Alberta's heritage. It protects services for the young and the elderly, the sick and the disabled, and it protects our air, land, water, and wildlife. It keeps us on the path to prosperity, both present and future.

Another part of Alberta's heritage is the effect of the ups and downs of commodity markets on our resource-based economy. Too often governments have responded by spending too much in the good times and cutting too much in the bad times, but thanks to past fiscal prudence and accumulated savings, today we do not have to make deep cuts to essential services. Over the past 16 years Alberta has paid down \$23 billion in debt. We have saved nearly \$25 billion, primarily in the heritage and sustainability funds. Mr. Speaker, Budget 2010 puts a stop to the wild ups and downs of this fiscal pendulum.

I'm pleased to report early signs of economic recovery: higher oil prices, growth in the housing market, and 12,500 new jobs in Alberta since October. In the past three months five new oil sands projects have been announced, adding over \$5 billion in investments. Just last month a \$4 billion bitumen upgrader was announced for Alberta's Industrial Heartland. That kind of investment is expected to spur Alberta's economy to grow by 2.6 per cent in 2010 and by an average of 3 per cent over the next three years.

That's the good news, that we and the rest of the world are transitioning out of this recession. But how long and how steep this transition will be and whether there will still be some dips ahead no one knows for sure. As an exporting economy what happens in the rest of the world affects Alberta, and there will be many risks still out there and beyond our control. The high Canadian dollar and fluctuating financial markets and energy prices create volatility in government revenues. Natural gas prices remain low. Canadian and U.S. stimulus funding will end this year with unknown impact. Our largest trading partner is \$12 trillion in debt. The outlook for commercial real estate is very uncertain. So while we have cause for optimism, the strength and the pace of Alberta's economic recovery cannot be taken for granted. Fiscal prudence is still required.

It is within this context that I present Budget 2010. It is a budget that enhances Alberta's competitiveness in the global market. A competitive Alberta creates jobs and opportunity, it reduces demand on social programs, and it generates the revenue to support the public services and social supports that Albertans value. The Fraser

Institute recently ranked Alberta as the number one province in Canada in which to invest. Budget 2010 keeps it that way by implementing our Premier's pledge that there will be no new taxes.

As I deliver this budget, I do so knowing that it will not satisfy everyone. Some will say we spend too much. Others will say we spend too little. Mr. Speaker, it's not about spending too much or spending too little; it's about spending the right amounts in the right places. This is what Budget 2010 does. It strikes the right balance. It protects priority programs without draining our savings, without going into debt for ongoing operations, and without raising taxes, and it puts us back into the black by Budget 2012. We will not meet today's needs on the backs of tomorrow's citizens. We will not saddle future generations with high taxes and debt.

Budget 2010 includes a total operating expense of \$33.2 billion. Excluding a one-time payment to Alberta Health Services, that is a 4.3 per cent increase over the 2009-2010 forecast. That 4.3 per cent is somewhat higher than the expected population growth and inflation of 3.5 per cent for this year. However, total increases over the full three years of this budget will actually be less than population growth and inflation over that same period. Based on projected revenues of \$34 billion and a total expense of \$38.7 billion, we are forecasting a deficit of \$4.7 billion. A smaller deficit of \$1.1 billion is forecast for 2011-12, and we get back into the black in year 3, with a projected surplus of \$505 million in 2012-13. Savings from the sustainability fund will offset the two years of deficit.

A year ago government announced plans to make \$2 billion in adjustments in Budget 2010 unless our financial situation improved. A great deal of work was done to achieve this, and I commend the decision-makers across government ministries who helped us to achieve \$1.3 billion in savings through program changes and efficiencies. In light of a brighter than expected fiscal and economic picture, we have chosen to reinvest these savings into priority areas and still be back in the black in three years. This does not mean our job is done. As we did last year, we will continue to identify and make in-year savings, with a target this year of finding an additional \$240 million.

There has been much speculation, and some of it, frankly, fearmongering, about potential budget reductions. Budget 2010 does reduce funding in a number of areas. These reductions start in government areas that do not directly affect services to the public: a reduction for Executive Council of 8.6 per cent, for Service Alberta of 15.6 per cent, and for International and Intergovernmental Relations of 7.7 per cent. About 700 government positions are being eliminated, but we have worked hard to minimize job losses, with an effort to reassign many affected employees to vacant positions. We will continue to work with our public-sector unions to live within our budgets while minimizing job losses.

Some reductions are made to programs that deliver front-line public services. As more Albertans go back to work, the demand for income supports is expected to diminish, resulting in a reduction to income supports of \$41 million. Greater emphasis on early intervention and more permanent and enhanced foster placements will reduce child intervention services by \$27 million. We will save \$19 million by focusing our community grants to those groups that provide services and supports to the most vulnerable. We will reduce the costs for the rent supplement program by \$13 million by targeting rental assistance to those with the greatest needs.

Reductions, however, are not being made across the board. Budget 2010 protects programs that help the most vulnerable. Benefits are protected at current levels for recipients of AISH and Alberta seniors' benefits, and funding levels are maintained for the persons with developmental disabilities program. Benefits are also

maintained for seniors' supports for dental, optical, and school property tax assistance. More than \$40 million is added to some of these programs to accommodate growth in caseloads. Funding levels are also maintained for programs such as Alberta aids to daily living, affordable housing programs, and homelessness initiatives. Mr. Speaker, this budget and this government will help those who need help.

3:30

Budget 2010 highlights Alberta's continuing commitment to publicly funded health care. It eliminates the Alberta Health Services debt with a one-time injection of \$759 million on top of a \$343 million payment made in 2009-10, and it increases Alberta Health Services' annual budget by \$1.3 billion, adjusting the base by more than \$800 million and adding 6 per cent more to address cost pressures associated with an aging population, expensive drugs, and technologies. The 6 per cent increase is part of a five-year plan of predictable increases to support long-term planning in health care delivery, and the subsequent four years will see increases of 6 per cent in each of the next two years and 4.5 per cent in each of the following two years. Our commitment to public health care now totals more than \$15 billion, and with this five-year plan for health care funding health officials commit to identifying new efficiencies in service delivery to ensure that the health care system operates within its means.

Our government is also committed to ensuring that Albertans are treated the same as all other Canadians. Today the province of Alberta receives from Ottawa at least \$200 less per person than other provinces under the Canada Health transfer. This amounts to a shortfall of more than \$700 million a year. This is not right. This is not fair. We will vigorously pursue fair funding on behalf of all Albertans.

Alberta's most important renewable resource is our children, and the biggest investors in Alberta's future are their parents. So to protect our children, our homes, and our communities, Budget 2010 provides \$148 million to continue our safe communities program. This \$148 million will enhance addiction prevention programs and services for families of at-risk children, it will complete the Alberta gang strategy and the long-term crime reduction strategy, and it will hire another 100 front-line police officers. Mr. Speaker, we're going to make sure that 2010 is not a good year for gangs, drug dealers, and thieves.

These social programs are not cheap. To pay for them, Budget 2010 contains initiatives that generate jobs, opportunities, and revenues. Value-added initiatives such as the bitumen royalty in kind will help us get the most out of Alberta's conventional energy and oil sands. Budget 2010 allocates \$237 million to innovation, research, and technology commercialization that will bring that research to market. This includes \$188 million for programs under Alberta Innovates to develop Alberta-grown technology and environmental, medical, and manufacturing solutions into marketable products and services.

A strong reputation as a good environmental steward is increasingly important to protect access to our export markets. Budget 2010 continues Alberta's commitment to carbon capture and storage with the potential for the technology to increase oil recovery from existing wells. But our environmental stewardship goes well beyond greenhouse gases. Budget 2010 supports renewable energy, environmental management and compliance, and the renewed water for life strategy. For environmentally friendly municipal transit \$470 million over three years is committed to the Green TRIP, and work will continue on developing regional plans under Alberta's land-use framework.

Other natural resources such as forestry and agriculture contribute to Alberta's economic strength, and Budget 2010 allocates \$10 million to address workforce retention and retraining and to enhance forest health initiatives. In agriculture Budget 2010 provides over \$9 million to AgriFlex, a new cost-shared program with the federal government to improve agriculture's competitiveness. Plus, \$40 million is added to the cost-shared Growing Forward initiative to support agricultural innovation and risk management.

The future of Alberta is sitting in classrooms and lecture halls across the province right now, and Budget 2010 recognizes that a solid education is both a personal advantage for students and a competitive advantage for Alberta. School boards will receive an increase of \$250 million, or 4.8 per cent, for announced grant rate increases, enrolment growth, and specialized services. Support for adult learning is increased by \$31 million, with a focus on training for work programs. Overall, base operating grants for postsecondary institutions are maintained at 2009 levels, which is over \$2 billion.

This budget fulfills our commitment to invest in the future through expanded, improved infrastructure. The capital plan supports \$7.2 billion in infrastructure in 2010-11 and more than \$20 billion over the next three years. This infrastructure spending will create thousands of new jobs in construction at a time when unemployment is high and costs are low. Lower building costs mean we get more bang for our buck, and the new jobs will support financial stability for many hardworking Alberta families.

Budget 2010 recognizes that Alberta's economic future is increasingly in the north. Accordingly, we will build new resource roads in northern Alberta and continue the twinning of portions of highway 63. In Fort McMurray we will complete two highway interchanges and a new five-lane bridge over the Athabasca River.

Across the province work will start on 41 schools that were already approved under the capital plan. Funding is also allocated for water and waste water, affordable housing, and supportive living. The proceeds from Alberta capital bonds will provide \$100 million to build seniors' accommodations, including long-term care facilities. This year work continues on the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads and on improving highways across the province.

Fully one-quarter of our three-year capital plan is invested directly in municipalities. Municipalities receive infrastructure grants and support totalling \$1.78 billion in 2010-11 and \$5.25 billion over three years. This includes the municipal sustainability initiative, which receives a \$476 million increase, providing municipalities with a total of \$876 million to address their infrastructure needs.

In summary, Budget 2010 strikes the right balance, and we achieved this balance because we stayed true to the Premier's four-point recovery plan. We have reduced spending in most departments, with over \$1.3 billion in cuts from forecast targets. Second, we have used our savings, the sustainability fund, to protect priority programs: education for the young, health care for the sick, and strengthened supports for the elderly and the disabled. Third, we continue to build infrastructure, creating more jobs today and a

foundation for future economic growth. Finally, we've kept Alberta competitive with no new taxes and a balanced budget by 2012. This budget will restore economic growth in Alberta. And let's be perfectly clear about this: in today's economy what's good for Alberta is good for all of Canada.

Some critics will point out that this budget has a large deficit. It does, and neither I nor anybody else on this side of the House is happy about that, but running a deficit in 2010 doesn't make us any different than most other provinces or the federal government. What does make us different is that we are not creating new debt for the day-to-day operations. Our projected debt supports capital spending, infrastructure that will be there for future generations. What does make us different is that our budget shortfalls this year and next can and will be covered by our rainy-day savings account. What other government in Canada can say that?

We will not allow annual deficits to aggregate into a large debt to burden future generations. Albertans want to pay for services, not to service interest on debt. We made that mistake in the 1980s, and we will not make that mistake again.

Mr. Speaker, this budget supports the Premier's vision of a fiscally strong Alberta with a competitive and innovative economy and the best publicly funded health care in Canada and the most advanced infrastructure.

Will budget cutbacks present challenges for some Albertans? Of course. But it is a fair budget. No one group is singled out. Every sector, every Albertan will be asked to give up a little. That's the key to our recovery: the recognition that we're all in this together. So working together, we can weather the economic storm until sunnier times return, which they will, and we will keep Alberta a beautiful and healthy Alberta, the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this is certainly a challenging budget, deserving of comprehensive scrutiny.

At this time I would beg leave to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on February 10, 2010.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:42 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Boutilier
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